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THE DRAMATIC ART OF SOPHOCLES

BY CHANDLER RATHFON POST

I

IF the discordant band of literary scholars were confronted with the simple question, what is the most distinctive quality of Sophocles as a dramatist, the answer would be for once universal and unhesitating — his stress upon delineation of character. This aspect of his production so stares one in the face that it cannot escape even the most perversely astute and subtle critic. He perfected, as Christ says, the *Charaktertragödie*; ¹ and many other peculiarities of his dramatic manner may be traced more or less directly to this, his chief propensity. The play, according to his conception, is a mode of holding up the mirror to human nature, and from this conception as a center emanate his other ideas of the drama. He constructs a whole tragedy with almost the single purpose of such delineation in view.

With Aeschylus, characterization is not the determinative factor. His first concerns are well-nigh mathematical precision in the architecture of the plot, imaginative diction, the impressions of awe and grandeur, religious problems, and the like; and he constructs a tragedy with the purpose of exhibiting these qualities. He outlines his personages only so far as is required for the development of the action. I would not give the impression that he is not a master in the drawing of character; on the contrary, he seems to me supreme in this art and moreover consciously to exercise it. But though he himself has a well-defined plastic conception of even the most insignificant of his creatures, he will never model the action merely in order to bring one of them into high relief. Engrossed with the plot, diction, and ethical problems, and building the drama so as to lend prominence to these elements, he stops over characterization only that he may give his personages reason-

¹ Wilhelm von Christ, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur, fünfte Auflage*, Munich, 1908, p. 303.

able motives for their actions. To take as an example the opportunity for comparison that most readily offers itself, the treatment of the Electra myth by both dramatists, Aeschylus in his *Choephoroi*, in order to endow the heroine with real existence, depicts her through the opening scenes as a timid, hesitating girl, the virginal ideal of the Greeks; but then, having once made her actually live before the spectators, he does not trouble himself further than to show that side of her personality which is essential to the progress of the story. Concretely, in order that she may inspire Orestes to the deed of vengeance and assist him in carrying to fruition his sanguinary plans, Aeschylus imbues her with such sisterly and filial devotion that even the shrinking maiden becomes capable of the most blood-curdling desires. The poet himself had a complete mental vision of her character in every phase and knew how she would demean herself under all circumstances, but he chooses to reveal only those aspects which suffice to change her from a puppet into a human being and which motivate the action. This he does, however, with a few masterly touches, and concentrates his energy upon other factors.

Sophocles assumes quite the opposite attitude, subordinating construction and other factors to characterization. He builds up his plot in such a way as to afford himself an opportunity for such study; and whereas in Aeschylus other forces coöperate with character to effect the dénouement, he produces the issue from the entanglement wholly through the qualities of his personages. He even alters and manipulates the mythical material so that he may the more readily and brilliantly practise his hobby. For the contrast with Aeschylus, we may return to the example of the *Electra*. Hitherto in the tale of the vengeance upon Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, Orestes, the male heir, had been the principal figure. Sophocles at once realized that if he were to treat the subject in the traditional fashion he could not base his dénouement upon character, for the deed of Orestes was not purely an expression of his temperament but partly traceable to the direction of the Pythian oracle. Desiring a tragedy in which the chief personage should be actuated by no other force than the springs of character, he rearranged the myth so that Orestes should fade into the background and Electra, who was not influenced by the dictates of Apollo but by motives arising in her own personality, should become the protagonist. Where

it was necessary, furthermore, he changed and developed the whole story so as to serve his purpose, the delineation of her constancy. A brief analysis of the play from this standpoint will illustrate his ordinary structural method, which it is important to comprehend at the very beginning in order to approach intelligently the other elements of his technique.

All the opening section of the drama he consumes with impressing upon the audience Electra's devotion to her father's memory, showing her in the long *parodos* deaf to the attempts of the chorus at consolation and causing her in the succeeding dialogue to recount at length her own sorrows so that her fortitude may shine in relief against this darkness all the brighter. Creating, next, the figure of Chrysothemis and interrupting the movement for discussions between her and Electra, he emphasizes, by contrast, the heroic qualities of her sister. It is Electra that he represents as disputing with her mother the question of justice involved in the murder of Agamemnon, whereas Orestes would be the more natural antagonist of Clytaemnestra and had in the *Choe-phoroi*¹ cast in her face the same arguments that his sister now employs. Sophocles goes still further in his emphasis upon the rôle of Electra: he alters and elaborates the details of the brother's fictitious death that had been suggested by Aeschylus.² He transfers the scene of recognition until after the report of Orestes' mischance in order that her fixity of purpose may be still further tested by a belief in her brother's death and she may quite definitely become the principal figure by determining, when his arm fails, to perform the act of retribution herself.

But this transmutation of the myth has the additional purpose of giving prominence to another aspect of her temperament, the womanly. For Sophocles' personages are never simple. They are not, like the characters of Alfieri, allegorical embodiments of a single virtue or vice, but possess the natural complexity of human beings. Though Electra is almost virile in her steadfastness, she is yet as truly a woman, marked by the many intricate passions which the word implies. Despite her heroic devotion to the ideal of vengeance, Sophocles allows us to catch glimpses of those peculiarly feminine qualities which have given vogue

¹ 908 ff.

² 673 ff.

to the term "the weaker sex." The vice of "suffragism" may not consider Electra as a prototype of that harsh perversion of nature, the "new woman," and assume her as its patron, for the dramatist takes pains to emphasize the softer and more delicate side of her character. At odd moments she falters just a bit, complaining that her brother is not accomplishing his promises; but her magnificent strength of will for the greater part of the time stands out all the more vividly by contrast, when she is seen to be adorned with the lighter graces of womanhood, the control over which she has not gained without a struggle. In resistance to such strain her will appears all the more like steel. Again, for an instant Sophocles deftly touches upon the gentler traits, when in argument with Clytaemnestra she herself declares that under different circumstances she might have led a lovelier life.¹ So, later in the play, the alteration by which he postpones the unmasking of the falsity of the tale about Orestes' death, so that her profound love for her brother expresses itself in anguished sorrow, serves to stress this more feminine aspect of her nature. Since Electra would become unreal, tedious, and provocative of no sympathy, if she were naught but a personification of vengeance, the poet feels that he must indicate still further these mitigating qualities. He therefore develops a hint of Aeschylus.² The urn that his predecessor had mentioned as containing the ashes of Orestes, Sophocles actually introduces upon the stage and places in her hands in order to bring her grief to a pitiful climax by a lament over what she supposes to be her brother's remains. Other brighter phases of her character are her gratitude to the Paedagogue for his faithfulness and the girlish enthusiasm and unselfishness that she manifests when almost her first thought after recognizing her brother is to turn to her friends and share her joy with them. The result of a failure to alleviate Electra's steadfastness of purpose is exhibited by Hofmannsthal in his adaptation of the Sophoclean drama. To the principal trait of an unquenchable thirst for revenge he adds only a kind of animal love for father and brother, with the consequence that she has the reality only of a paranoiac and as a matter of fact actually goes mad. Finally, since Electra has become the protagonist, Sophocles has to construct the drama so that she shall preserve her ascendancy

¹ 616 ff.

² *Choeph.* 686-687.

until the conclusion. Although, then, Orestes is the actual instrument of Clytaemnestra's assassination, she goads him on to strike again, and it is really she who compasses the destruction of Aegisthus by enticing him into the palace. To take a last instance, the whole recognition scene between Orestes and his sister rests upon this principle of play-building for the purpose of the analysis of character. It is the compassion of Sophocles' hero—a compassion which the monomaniac of Aeschylus, cruel to her at the very moment of recognition, does not possess—that leads him to disclose himself to Electra, although through fear he had not first purposed such a revelation until the accomplishment of his dire intent.

Since without a knowledge of this fundamental principle of Sophocles' construction his dramatic methods in general may not be understood, it is important to establish at the outset that in taking up any new material he thinks first of how he can manipulate it so as to indulge himself in a study of character. His attitude will become clearer by an examination of other plays. Before the great dramatists of the fifth century the story of Philoctetes had been treated with primitive simplicity in the cyclic epics, all probably of the eighth century B.C., the *Cypria*, the *Little Iliad*, and the *Iliupersis*. Philoctetes, prince of Malis, bitten by a snake at the shrine of the goddess Chryse, upon the small island of the same name, had been abandoned by the Greek host, as it sailed to Troy, on Lemnos, by reason of his incessant and ill-omened outcries of pain and the stench of his wound. After the predestined decade of hostilities, it is discovered by an oracle that Troy can be taken only through the double agency of Neoptolemus, the son of the dead Achilles, and of Philoctetes, using the magic arrows which Heracles had bequeathed to him. Diomed is therefore despatched to Lemnos and experiences no difficulty in inducing the stricken hero to accede to the Greeks' petition.

The lost plays of Aeschylus and Euripides upon this subject, which antedated that of Sophocles, we know by a few fragments but especially by the account of them given in the rhetorician, Dio Chrysostom, who in his fifty-second essay compares the different versions of the three tragic writers and in his fifty-ninth paraphrases freely the first two scenes of Euripides. It is easy to forget that Aeschylus, the real creator of Attic tragedy, first moulded the rambling myths into the

severe, plastic lines of the drama, so that the later dramatists, whatever alterations they made in the superstructures, were indebted to him for the broad foundations of their plays; it is easy to forget that without Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are unimaginable. In the present instance he first manipulated the Philoctetes myth so as to render it capable of dramatic treatment. In order to create a conflict of wills, which is of the very essence of drama, he substituted for Diomed, who in the epics was the envoy to Philoctetes, Odysseus, who was the sufferer's bitterest enemy and, especially, had been instrumental in deserting him at Lemnos. Though we are informed of certain other factors in the Aeschylean version, a discussion of which may be postponed,¹ it is not known just where in the play the struggle between Odysseus and Philoctetes occurred, nor just how the former succeeded in his mission; but it is sufficient for our purpose to note that Aeschylus first discerned the dramatic possibilities which his successors utilized.

For the present it is necessary to observe in the Euripidean play, which was produced along with the *Medea* in 431, only those details which bear a relation to Sophocles' constructive method. In general it may be said that here, as in the versions of the Electra myth, Euripides followed more closely the Aeschylean prototype than did Sophocles. From Dio's description of the second scene it is clear that the bitterness of Philoctetes was not relieved by the lovelier qualities which in the Sophoclean drama appear at once and finally get the upper hand, for no sooner does he learn that Odysseus is a Greek, than he levels at him his dreadful bow. As far as our knowledge goes, then, the Philoctetes of Euripides would seem to have been merely an allegorical personification of resentment and consequently, to that extent, unreal; Sophocles realized this difficulty and gave his hero broader sympathies and a more human temperament. Nay, further, inasmuch as the whole tendency of Sophocles was to represent less violent and unnatural characters than Euripides, to endow them with more *σωφροσύνη* and thus to approximate them to the standard of the Periclean gentleman, he made even his Odysseus, as Dio remarks, *πολὺν πραότερον καὶ ἀπλούστερον*.² In this same scene, however, Euripides offered Sophocles a suggestion which he cleverly developed: Odysseus proceeds to win the confidence of

¹ Cf. below, pp. 109, 116.

² Dio, LII, 16.

Philoctetes by trumping up a tale that he himself, as a friend of the unjustly accused Palamedes, had been maltreated by the Greeks and so could sympathize with the fate of the Lemnian exile. The great invention of Euripides was the introduction of an embassy of Trojans seeking to win Philoctetes and his powerful arrows to their side. The purpose of such an invention is not far to seek: it afforded an unparalleled opportunity for one of those rhetorical debates which Euripides so loved, wherein the antagonists, Odysseus and the Trojans, would argue their respective causes with specious reasoning. It also intensified the situation by rendering it more urgent for Odysseus to succeed in his enterprise, for otherwise not only would he fail in obtaining the aid of Philoctetes but would actually incur the ignominy of having his arrows turned against the besieging host. Finally, before the study of the Sophoclean drama becomes possible, it is necessary to remember that the Philoctetes of Euripides appears to have been the kind of utterly woebegone beggar for which he was notorious, since Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* mentions his rags among those hanging in Euripides' closet when Dicaeopolis comes seeking for a costume.¹

From these few data on the versions by Aeschylus and Euripides, one thing at least is evident — that the interest was centered upon the dénouement, the success of Odysseus' undertaking. But with Sophocles it was a foregone conclusion that the interest should be centered upon psychological analysis. In order to create for himself the possibility of such study, he made important additions and changes, the most radical among which was the introduction upon the scene of the youth Neoptolemus. What was the result of such an innovation? The summoning of Achilles' son, according to the epic tradition, had been a part of the scheme of Fate for the capture of Troy, but he had not as yet been brought into intimate relationship with Philoctetes. In the Sophoclean drama, Odysseus transports him to Lemnos and employs him as a cat's paw to entrap the languishing bowman. Following the hint of his predecessor, Sophocles represents the ingenuous Neoptolemus as persuaded against his will by Odysseus to entice Philoctetes on board his ship through the stratagem of a pretence that he is leaving the Hellenic camp in high dudgeon and through a false promise that he will carry him home. At the critical moment the better nature of Neoptolemus

¹ *Ach.* 424.

reasserts itself, he divulges the trick, and restores the arrows which Philoctetes has entrusted to his keeping. Odysseus leaps forth from behind a rock where he has been lurking, and there occurs the required clash of conflicting personalities. Finally, resorting to the more humane mode of persuasion, Neoptolemus is already shaking the obstinacy of Philoctetes when Heracles appears and adds the seal of divine approval to the lad's pleading. The invention of the figure of Neoptolemus and such a treatment of his rôle transform the play into a study of character. In Sophocles, as I shall seek later to demonstrate, the protagonist is usually marked by an iron will focussed upon some definite object, as here Philoctetes is determined not to go to Troy; but were this single principal trait unrelieved, the hero would be no better than the automaton of Euripides. It is, then, to present a more comprehensive outlook upon the protagonist's character that the poet introduces Neoptolemus, contact with whose kind and noble disposition stimulates into action the lovelier and dormant qualities of Philoctetes, such as patriotism and a capacity for friendship. I have already pointed out in the *Electra* the devices to attain the similar end of alleviating the protagonist's fixity of purpose. A second reason for this innovation in the Philoctetes story is that Sophocles may study the personality of Neoptolemus himself, for he never rests content with the delineation of the leading person but labors as carefully upon the deuteragonist. To realize this one has only to think of such astounding creations as the Teucer of the *Ajax* or the Theseus of the *Oedipus Coloneus*; and the high minded but impulsive youth Neoptolemus, who is to literature what the ephebes of the Phidian frieze are to the representative arts, is one of the most attractive figures in the whole range of the drama. The painting of his gradual return to the upright path ranks among the greatest achievements of dramatic art. In the elaborate series of steps¹ by which Sophocles depicts him as moved to pity for Philoctetes and to compunction for his own treachery, one discerns the poet's own affection for his creation and the delight with which he delicately sketches his conversion. Throughout the play he develops, with the precision of a trained psychologist, the character of Philoctetes,

¹ For the discussion of this element in the dramatic technique of Sophocles, cf. below, pp. 119-120.

who was especially difficult to treat consistently because of his pathological condition. He proceeds to change the mythical material in certain other respects in order to emphasize the qualities of his hero. For instance, whereas former versions had represented the island of Lemnos as inhabited, he conceives it as a deserted wilderness and takes pains to inculcate his alteration upon the minds of the audience by repetition.¹ The desire of Sophocles was to augment the sufferings of Philoctetes, to outdo Euripides on his own ground in the accumulation of woes upon the protagonist, so that victory over such obstacles might cast an even stronger light upon his inflexible will.

Not to multiply examples unnecessarily, I conclude the discussion of this division of the subject by choosing some typical instances from other plays. In the only known previous treatment of the Antigone story, that of Aeschylus at the end of the *Seven Against Thebes*, she is aided in the burial of Polynices by half the chorus; Sophocles, for the sake of emphasizing her strength of purpose, causes her alone to perform the deed of mercy, and for the same reason makes Ismene into a kind of foil for Antigone, endowing her with timidity as a contrast to the firmness of her sister. He then proceeds to develop the myth still further in order to prevent this strong-minded maiden from seeming unreal. He makes her, like Electra, truly a woman, although she always remains a heroic woman. She has a lofty devotion to the ideal of sisterly piety, but Sophocles gives us also glimpses of the eternal feminine in her love for Creon's son, Haemon, and in her regret for the joys of marriage. In the cyclic epics, as far as information exists, the contest of Ajax and Odysseus for the arms of Achilles had been decided against the former either by Trojan prisoners or by the casual observation of a Trojan maiden. Sophocles in his *Ajax* may have followed Pindar,² or both may use the same unknown source, in making the Greek chieftains themselves the arbiters in favor of Odysseus. His purpose was to render the character of Ajax more logical by giving him an additional reason for wrath against his fellow generals, which would

¹ In the second line of the play Odysseus describes Lemnos as "untrodden of mortals and uninhabited"; in the last part of the parodos the Chorus bemoan his loneliness; and again his own first words of address to the strangers are exclamations of surprise that they have put in at an uninhabited island.

² *Nem.* VIII, 26 ff.

not have seemed to have an adequate foundation if the judges of the award had been merely Trojan women or prisoners. Since the dénouement depends upon the resentment of Ajax, the whole architecture of the play is strengthened by this change. Another example of a similar transformation of the myth for the sake of basing the dénouement upon character is afforded by the *Trachiniae*. According to the ordinary story Heracles had captured the maiden Iole for his son Hyllus, and had himself sent for the poisoned robe. Desiring to make the jealousy of the wife, Deianira, responsible for the catastrophe, Sophocles, following the version given by the epic, the *Capture of Oechalia*, represents the hero as capturing the maiden for himself, so that naturally his offended wife despatches the fatal garment under the delusion that it is endowed with an amorous charm to win back the affection of her husband. At the very end of his life, in his cleverest achievement in tragic architecture, the construction of a complex but compact play, the *Oedipus Coloneus*, almost out of nothing,—a veritable making of dramatic bricks from mythical straws,—he exhibits his usual tendency to find causes for the action in the qualities of his personages. According to the older version, the curse of Oedipus upon his sons was occasioned by Fate, and the fratricidal strife was the result; according to Sophocles, the fratricidal strife was born from the evil passions of Eteocles and Polynices, and the curse was the result.¹

In this stress upon the study of character, the poet, as in other aspects of his genius, was partly a product of his age. With the new enthusiasm for investigation of every kind that came with the Periclean Age and manifested itself especially in the educational endeavors of the Sophists, as in the Italian Renaissance, man began to study himself, and then, by a perfectly natural transition, was led to study his fellows. One reflection of this tendency was the maxim which Socrates sought to inculcate: γνῶθι σεαυτόν; another was Sophocles' conscious psychological analysis. He has enjoyed among moderns the widest popularity of the triumvirate of tragic writers partly because of the conscious effort

¹ This statement rests upon the interpretation of the *πρόθε* of line 1375, as referring not to a curse of Oedipus before the play begins but to his former imprecations within the play itself when he learns of his sons' misdeeds. This interpretation is accepted by the most creditable scholars: cf. the comment upon this line in the Jebb and Wolff-Bellermann editions.

that he spends upon characterization, for in this respect we of the present day are far more exacting than the ancients. We condemn without a fair trial such a dramatist as the Spanish Echegaray, simply because his characters are not always consistent or convincing, no matter what other virtues of delicately mathematical construction his works possess; we condone, nay, wax enthusiastic about any play that includes a group of interesting personalities, such as the *Passing of the Third Floor Back*, no matter how grave are its architectonic defects or how pernicious its teaching. It is an ill wind, however, that blows no good; and this unbalanced critical attitude has at least inspired a renewed admiration for Sophocles.

II

Having established the determinative motive of the Sophoclean drama, we may pass to an examination of the moulds in which he casts his characters. Many of these I have suggested in the previous discussion. First and foremost, in his delineation of the protagonist, he lays emphasis upon the strength of the human will. From the very beginning the principal character is marked by an iron will centered upon a definite object; and the drama, according to Sophocles, consists to a certain extent of a series of tests, arranged in climactic order, to which the will is subjected, and over all of which it rises triumphant.¹ In this respect Sophocles presents a curious analogy to Corneille. Since with the tendency of French classicism to bind itself by rule Corneille constructs his tragedies more strictly than Sophocles according to the principle of proving the invincibility of the "volonté" by a graduated series of tests, I can perhaps best illustrate my meaning by first analyzing one of his typical productions, the *Polyeucte*. Polyeucte, a noble Armenian lately converted to Christianity, concentrates his will upon faithfulness to the new religion. Though there is the secondary motive of a former "affaire de coeur" between Polyeucte's wife, Pauline, and a Roman knight, Sévère, Corneille builds his play out of a climactic group of ordeals to which the hero's will is subjected. In the first act, despite the ominous dream and forebodings of Pauline, he persists in his

¹ M. Croiset (*Histoire de la littérature grecque*, second edition, vol. III, pp. 250 ff.) suggests this theory of the Sophoclean drama but does not develop it.

desire for baptism. In the second, despite the counsels of a Christian friend, Néarque, to a milder course and despite the danger which he incurs, he carries devotion to his religion to the point of overturning the statues of the false gods. In the third act, he endures unflinchingly the anger of his father-in-law, the governor of Armenia, and the sight of his friend's martyrdom. In the fourth, while he awaits his own execution, he has to meet the still harder test of love, the remonstrances and even the reproaches of his wife, who declares that his steadfastness is only an indication of his readiness to abandon her. The test of love is rendered all the more potent and terrible by the thought that after his death Pauline may marry his former rival. In the last act his will refuses to succumb to the subtler and Machiavellian test of opportunism, when, in order to save himself, he is besought to simulate a return to Paganism only until the emperor's envoy shall depart; and finally his resolution is adamant against the combined objurations of his wife and her father.

Although with the greater freedom of Greek literature Sophocles does not confine himself to such a rigid system of tests, he usually constructs his tragedies in similar fashion. This method may be called the first of those general principles employed by Sophocles in dramatic architecture. The *Electra*, indeed, is as perfect an example as any work of Corneille. The heroine's will is directed towards vengeance, and Sophocles makes a play out of a rising scale of temptations to relinquish her purpose. The drama begins with her rejection of the efforts of the chorus to console her for the unhappy state of the household and to inspire her with resignation to existing conditions. The next section of the play is made by causing her to meet the exhortations of her sister to compromise. A third part is added when she has to stand firm against the insults of her mother. In conclusion, she does not succumb beneath the culminating blow of the false report of her brother's death but attains a final and complete victory of the will by assuming herself the gruesome task of assassination. Virtually the whole tragedy, then, is constructed of a series of tests. The Orestes motive, of course, like the Sévère motive in Corneille's *Polyeucte*, has to appear, and, as a concession to mythical tradition, the brother has to reveal himself to the sister and become the actual instrument of the deed; but he is kept subsidiary and Electra dominates the scene until the very end, when she lures Aegisthus to his doom.

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is almost as good an example. The king's mind is set upon finding the murderer of Laius, who is the cause of the curse upon Thebes. The prologue announces his purpose, and, in this case, the tests of the purpose which constitute the four episodes are all of the same nature, calculated to deter him by the possibility that he himself is the culprit, but they are of growing intensity as the possibility becomes more and more a certainty. In the first episode he is not turned aside by the dark hints of the seer, Tiresias. In the second he persists in the search by questioning his wife, Jocasta, although every word of hers tends to confirm his suspicion. In the third, despite the discovery that the oracle which foretold that he should slay his father and espouse his mother may yet be fulfilled, and despite the entreaties of Jocasta, who is now cognizant of the awful fact, he will not be diverted, but reiterates his intention of carrying his investigation to the bitter end.¹ In the fourth he continues with a dogged obstinacy his interrogation of the Theban herdsman, who has the key to the situation, until, uninfluenced by the conviction that he is shattering his own happiness, he ferrets out the whole appalling truth. Since the long exodus concerns itself only with the catastrophe, the main fabric of the tragedy may properly be said to consist of a series of tests.

All of the other extant dramas except the *Trachiniae* have largely the same architectural framework. In the earlier works, the *Antigone* and *Ajax*, it is only the first part that is so constructed. The object of Antigone's will is piety towards her dead brother Polynices, and here the tests begin in the very prologue when she cannot be moved from her determination to bestow upon him the precious funeral rites by the fear of the punishment of death or by the supplications of her sister, Ismene. Though she at once achieves her purpose by scattering dust over her brother's body, the tests do not end, for Sophocles develops the plot to a scene between her and Creon, in which she thwarts his attempt to make her acknowledge that she was wrong, still maintaining her strength of will and sense of righteousness, by asserting the supremacy of divine over human law, which her opponent has invoked as the principle of his action. Even by adding to the death sentence the torture of burial alive he cannot coerce her into acknowledging any guilt. To show that her determination has conquered every obstacle

¹ O. T. 1076-1085.

Sophocles finally touches upon the motive of her love for Haemon. In this earlier period when he has not yet fully matured this method of construction, the tests are not arranged in climactic order as in the *Electra* or the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; especially, to the Hellenic mind, Antigone would not find love the strongest drawback in the attainment of her purpose. The second half of the tragedy, according to a method that I shall later outline,¹ is constructed of tests of Creon's will. In the *Ajax* the protagonist is determined upon suicide. A large section of the first episode is taken up with the efforts of the chorus and of his concubine Tecmessa to comfort him; then Sophocles introduces the motive of his love for his little son, Eurysaces, to put his will to a severer proof; and at the end of the scene Tecmessa's fresh entreaties are of no avail. The second episode is used further to illustrate his indomitable will by a severer test. Though he has relented from his sternness towards his family and friends and though he is no longer aided by that passionate exaltation in which he had decided upon suicide, even now in his calmer and saner mood he clings to his resolve as fixedly as ever and deludes them with ambiguous language. The tragedy breaks in two at the middle after the death of Ajax, and the second part concerns itself with the dispute over the burial of the hero's body.

In the works of his old age, the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*, the structure of the early plays is exactly reversed. Now, the first part contains exposition and preparatory development, and the tests are relegated to the second half. In the *Philoctetes* the first half and more of the play depict the treachery of Odysseus and Neoptolemus, although from the very beginning the protagonist is seen to be marked by the customary iron will, here directed against reconciliation with the Greeks who have wronged him. When Neoptolemus has once revealed the strategem the rest is only a series of proofs of the will. Philoctetes, refusing to gratify his enemies by returning to Troy, is impervious, first, to the possibility of starvation when he is deprived of the bow with which he has been wont to forage for his food; second, to the efforts of the crew of Neoptolemus to shake his resolve; third, to his own desire to show his gratitude to Neoptolemus who generously restores the bow; fourth, to the threats of Odysseus; fifth, to his longing for

¹ Cf. below, p. 87.

fame and recovery from his disease, which the young prince tells him an oracle has promised if he will join his former comrades at Troy ; and sixth, and as a climax, to the continued kindness of Neoptolemus, who now even agrees to take him home to Malis. He is finally persuaded only by the direct intervention of heaven in the person of Heracles.

The *Oedipus Coloneus* affords the most signal instance in the extant works of Sophocles of the manner in which he constructed a whole drama out of very slight mythical material. In his other plays he evolves from a few bare mythical elements an extended and elaborate psychological crisis ; in the *Oedipus Coloneus* he starts with even less, and at that, with material which would seem at first sight to offer very little dramatic opportunity. About all that he had to begin with was the local legend of his birthplace, according to which Oedipus had met at Colonus his death and apotheosis in the shrine of the Eumenides. Upon this small foundation he chose to rear his structure. In this case where Sophocles was dependent almost wholly upon his own powerful imagination, one may discern more clearly those principles which he usually observed in dramatic architecture. First, the protagonist's will must be firm and centered upon some purpose ; what purpose would be more likely to suggest itself than the desire to remain in Attica and thus to obtain that translation to heaven which had been foretold to him by Apollo ? The next step was to create a series of obstacles which should put to the test this determination : what more natural obstacle than the wish on the part of others to decoy him away from Athens ? Sophocles, therefore, invented¹ an oracle that predicted success to that party at Thebes which should obtain possession of Oedipus, thus cleverly bringing the well-known myth of the Seven against Thebes into connection with his play by imagining a period of preparation anterior to the actual war. The drama was now made ; all that was left to do was to devise a chain of episodes in which the several factions interested in the government of Thebes should seek to gain control of Oedipus.

The first part of the play is occupied chiefly by an exposition of the arrival and welcome of Oedipus, although he is subjected forthwith to

¹ We may use the word "invented," although it is always possible that he drew from some source as yet unknown to us.

the lesser test of opposition on the part of the elders of Colonus, when they beseech him to depart from their coasts, horror-stricken to learn his identity. After he has won their sympathy and prevailed upon the king, Theseus, to protect him, the long first episode concludes and the tests begin. In the second episode his will is put to the trial of force, when Creon, the envoy of Eteocles, who is the present lord of Thebes, seeks to coerce him into returning to that city, first by abducting his two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, thus removing the blind old man's means of sustenance, and second, by offering to carry off Oedipus himself by violence. In the end Theseus prevents this piece of insolence and restores the maidens. The third episode is again one of preparation in which Oedipus is persuaded to receive the representative of the other faction, his son Polynices, who has called down upon himself the wrath and curse of his father by quarrelling with his brother, Eteocles, over the Theban throne. In the first part of the fourth episode the old king is put to the trial of persuasive language¹ and of the inclination of a father's heart when Polynices pleads with him that he may join the expedition of the Seven Champions against Eteocles. After he has angrily refused with additional curses, the rest of the fourth episode and the exodus are composed naturally of the reward for his fixity of purpose — the promised apotheosis. In the *Oedipus Coloneus* Sophocles approximates closest the method of the modern dramatist, who usually invents the whole of his plot; he might well have described the process by the words which Racine proudly used of his own work, "faire quelque chose de rien."

In the Sophoclean conception of the drama we have an explanation for the striking fact that six out of the seven plays are called after the protagonists, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Oedipus Coloneus*, the *Ajax*, the *Philoctetes*, the *Antigone*, and the *Electra*; since the tragedy relates the victory of the protagonist's will, it rightly bears his name as a title. Since the *Trachiniae* is built on a different model, it follows the Aeschylean precedent of using the name of the chorus. One of Sophocles' main reasons in employing this first constructive principle

¹ L. Bellermaun in his excellent treatment of the *Gang der dramatischen Handlung* appended to his edition of this play analyzes brilliantly the general structure and points out especially the different nature of the two great trials, one by force and the other by persuasion, to which Oedipus is subjected.

was the desire to exhibit, by putting the will to severe proof, the underlying strength of character which justifies the prominent position held by the protagonist in the action and properly elicits the admiration of the spectators. But Sophocles applies his dramatic principle still further. He goes on to test the will of a secondary character, usually the antagonist of the leading figure. In this case, since the will is focussed upon wrong, it usually has to succumb. The best example is the *Antigone*, the latter section of which consists of tests of Creon's determination to maintain the law of the state. First, he is not deterred by Antigone's eloquent championship of divine law; the whole third episode is a fruitless effort on the part of his son, Haemon, to influence him towards mercy. Being a subordinate figure, however, and of a weaker nature than Antigone, whose invincible spirit acquires additional relief by contrast, he finally breaks down under Tiresias' prophecy of impending curses. It is the same in the *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus has decided to hoodwink the outcast, but by a chain of incidents, which I shall later indicate,¹ is gradually led to relinquish his purpose. So, perhaps, the latter half of the *Ajax* might be considered a series of tests, consisting of the arguments and threats of Menelaus and Agamemnon, which Teucer undergoes in his resolution to bury his brother's corpse, although here the will of the secondary personage is not fixed upon unrighteous action.

This analysis of the dramas of Sophocles leads to some very curious and important conclusions. In the *Antigone* and *Ajax* the structure is closely parallel: the first part is composed of tests of the protagonist's will, and the second of tests of the deuteragonist's. Inasmuch as the leading character dies comparatively early in each of these tragedies, and the latter part concerns itself with these proofs of subordinate wills and with other matters not inextricably bound up with the fabric of the first section, the two works contain slight anticlimaxes, and the *Ajax* actually falls asunder in the middle. From these similarities, which are so striking as not to be without significance, may it be deduced that both plays were composed at the same period of the poet's life? The *Antigone* was produced in 442 or 441 B.C.;² it has usually been held that the *Ajax* also is to be assigned to an early period, or at least the

¹ Cf. below, p. 120.

² Cf. ed. of Jebb, *Introduction*, pp. xlii ff.

earliest known period of his production, on the basis of such internal evidence as the appearance of anapaests for an introduction to the more purely lyric measures of the parodos, the frequency of dochmiac meters, the absence of the long glyconic periods that are to be found in the other works of Sophocles, and the more epic and Aeschylean tone of the language. Does not the structural parallelism provide still more potent proof that the *Ajax* was written at about the same time as the *Antigone*, and may we not believe that the restriction of the principal tests to the first half of the play marks the years when Sophocles had not yet perfected the system? The *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Electra* are usually assigned on the ground of internal evidence and of possible political allusions to a period covering broadly the next three decades after 440 B.C.; the analogous structure, which now carries the tests, arranged in order of climax, through the greater part of the drama and reserves the end only for the dénouement, would confirm this conjecture and would naturally characterize the poet's mature or middle period. There is an architectural likeness also between the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus Coloneus* in that the first section of the play gives the foundation upon which later the tests are piled. The second hypothesis of the *Philoctetes* assigns it to 409 B.C.; the general voice of Greek and Roman literature, including such reputable authors as Plutarch¹ and Cicero,² connects the *Oedipus Coloneus* with the story that the aged Sophocles, haled before a court by his legitimate son, Iophon, on the allegation of unfitness to administer the family estate through senility, recited the exquisite first stasimon in glorification of Colonus and Athens as a sufficient proof of his unimpaired faculties. Certain critics, carrying the modern sceptical attitude to the point of silliness, have refused credence to the tale, resorting to the easy and overworked expedient of declaring it the invention of a comic poet;³ but what internal evidence exists corroborates rather than contradicts the unanim-

¹ *An seni sit res publ. ger.*, 3.

² *De senectute*, c. 7. Other authorities are: Lucian, *Macrobioi*, 24; Apuleius, *Apol.*, p. 298; Valerius Maximus, VIII, 7, 12.

³ It is true that a corrupt passage in the *Vita* seems to mean that a writer of comedy had represented Iophon in this guise upon the stage, but the likelihood is that he had some starting-point in fact though he and those who repeated his gossip may have added decorative details.

ity of ancient tradition, at least in the question of dating,¹ and the structure of the play adds strong proof by coupling it with the *Philoctetes*, which certainly belongs to his old age. Sophocles' reason for abandoning the more stereotyped dramatic form of his middle period may have been the fear that a tragedy consisting of nothing but tests might be monotonous. The structural analysis is thus important not only for the comprehension of the evolution of the poet's dramatic art but also for establishing the dates of several of his plays.

The determination exhibited by the characters of Sophocles is no dark and unreflecting stubbornness, but, as Croiset points out in a brilliant passage,² is illumined by the light of reason. They may start with a mere instinctive feeling of right, but the intellect soon comes to the aid of intuition; or the logical motive may have been present from the first, although it is not explained until a more advanced moment of the action. The best example is *Antigone*. In the beginning she reveals only the feeling that she must bury the body of Polynices; it is not until the middle of the play that she lays bare the springs of her conduct in the famous speech which proclaims the precedence of the higher over the earthly laws. Likewise, at the end of the *Ajax*, Teucer, in elaborate rhetorical replies to Menelaus and Agamemnon, seeks to justify his early formed resolve to honor his dead brother with the proper ceremonial interment. Electra defends herself with sound logic against the specious excuses of Chrysothemis and the impassioned rhetoric of Clytaemnestra. In this stress upon the reason Sophocles is once more an exponent of the cultured atmosphere of his native city. The personages of Aeschylus act rather upon sublime impulse, although they are by no means marked by that primitive roughness which it is the fashion to ascribe to them. The characters of Sophocles are still

¹ Some critics have sought to place it earlier in the career of Sophocles by discovering definite political allusions. Lachmann, for example (*Über die Absicht und Zeit des Sophokleischen Ödipus auf Kolonos*, Rhein. Mus., 1827) assigns it to a period just before the Peloponnesian War, imagining that Sophocles intended to show what glory Athens would gain by the outcome. But such assumptions are gratuitous; and the peril of persisting in reading contemporary history into the plays of Sophocles is shown by the absurdities into which A. Schöll lapses in his *Sophokles*, interpreting, for instance, each of the Greek chieftains after whom *Philoctetes* inquires as some prominent figure in Athenian politics.

² *Histoire*, vol. III, pp. 264 ff.

further removed from the uncivilized type ruled only by the passions; they are the intelligent, perfectly poised individuals of Periclean Athens with whom the poet was familiar.

The fixity of purpose is further relieved by combination with other traits. I have already referred to the gentler aspects of Electra and Antigone. In the same way the sternness of the king Oedipus is modified by love of his children. The relentless decision of Ajax stands out against his fondness for his concubine and parents and against his profound affection for his child, who is brought upon the scene partly for the sake of revealing this other phase of his character. Sophocles changes the whole story of Philoctetes by the introduction of Neoptolemus in order to exhibit the fairer sides of the hero's nature, such as his craving for companionship and his trustworthiness; and he even delays the action for a number of lines so that Philoctetes may inquire anxiously after his old comrades in the expedition.¹

III

In this delineation of character Sophocles is, as always, the artist. Since harmony is the very essence of art, it was necessary that his personages should be consistent throughout, and he obtained this consistency partly by giving to the protagonist a uniformly inflexible will. But that the artistic harmony might be perfect, it was necessary also that the personages should be adapted to their purpose, or, to put it more concretely, to the atmosphere of tragedy. Conforming to this requirement, the principal characters of Sophocles are truly tragic, first, because they are heroic. He studies their qualities, to be sure, from everyday life, but he magnifies these in order to bring them into accord with the loftier sphere in which his personages reside. Not all of his figures, of course, loom so large against the background, as for instance the messengers or such subordinate characters as Chrysothemis and Ismene, though Ismene in the *Antigone* becomes heroic enough in the end to offer to share her sister's fate; but the prominent participants in the action always retain much of the nimbus of majesty that overhangs the

¹ This is one of the justifications for what appears at first sight a superfluous passage (lines 412 ff.): other reasons for its appearance I shall mention later; cf. below, p. 122.

myths of gods and demigods in which they had their origin. The tragedies of Sophocles do not take place on the mountain heights of Aeschylus nor on the often humdrum plains of Euripides; they occupy a midway position. They are not pervaded by that mysterious atmosphere of supernatural awe which almost terrifies the reader of Aeschylus, nor do they descend to the vulgarity of Euripides, which is so incongruous to the noble spirit of the ancient legends. Electra is maltreated, but she is not debased, as by Euripides, into the farmer's wife, disturbed by petty domestic cares. The Philoctetes of Euripides, we gather from the slur upon him in the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes,¹ was one of those squalid wrecks of humanity with whom he loved to fill the stage. Sophocles makes his Philoctetes an even more horrible sufferer, and influenced by his rival, spares no detail in depicting his woes; but he elevates him above the level of abject realism by adding such redeeming qualities as his superb will, his affection for Neoptolemus, and his patriotism.² Sophocles is here an exponent of his classical age, which laid stress upon the golden mean in action, and avoiding excess on one side and the other, exemplifies the virtue of moderation or *σωφροσύνη*, which was to the Greek as charity to the Christian. He does not climb so high as Aeschylus, and yet disdains the *banalité* of Euripides. All this was put epigrammatically, according to Aristotle,³ by Sophocles himself: Σοφοκλῆς ἔφη αὐτὸς μὲν οἴους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδης δὲ οἰοί εἶσι.

His characters, even though they are in the wrong, have no meanness about them. If they are sinners, they are heroic sinners, with even their misdeeds on a magnificent scale. Ajax, guilty of the sin by which the angels fell, in a final superb outburst of pride, calls upon the very Sun to further his own interests: ⁴

¹ 424.

² Lessing, in a well-known passage of the *Laocoön* (Chap. IV), points out that Philoctetes' physical sufferings do not disgrace the tragic stage because they are united to mental anguish.

³ *Poetics*, XXV.

⁴ *Ajax*, 845-849, translation of Sir George Young, which has never been properly appreciated for its happy union of faithfulness to the text and poetic phrasing. The other quotations in the article are from the same source.

"Thou too,
Driving thy chariot up the steep of heaven,
When thou revisitest my native land,
Sun, draw thy gilded rein, and tell of me,
My woes and ruin, to the old man my sire,
And that unhappy dame who nurtured me."

Agamemnon in the *Ajax* is overbearing, but he preserves the majesty of a king. Creon in the *Antigone* is no wanton tyrant; his acts are passionately impulsive and short-sighted, but nevertheless based on principles that seem to him righteous. Clytaemnestra in the *Electra* is dyed in wickedness, but even so, through the force of her great personality, demands admiration. Polynices in the *Oedipus Coloneus* is unfilial, unbrotherly towards Eteocles, and covetous, but his crime is heroic, in that he arouses all Greece to a war to further his ambitions. The personages of Sophocles err with the grandeur of an Antony, when, taunted by Cleopatra for fearing the consequences of his illicit passion, he protests in lines as fine as any to be found in the whole range of Shaksperian drama: ¹

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do 't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless."

The characters of Sophocles are seldom stained with such dwarfing vices as cowardice, avarice, or conceit. Preferring to depict an existence untrammelled by the pettiness of life, he has ever been known as an exponent of that indifference to trials and tribulations, in a word, of that serenity which marked the placid Periclean age in which he had grown to maturity.

Odysseus is the exception that proves the rule. Possessing the same traits both in the *Ajax* and in the *Philoctetes* he is an exemplar of the baser passions. It is important to digress for a moment upon a subject which has been so widely misunderstood and which involves the fundamental principles of the poet's thought and relation to his times.

¹ *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, 1.

Odysseus is conceived as the perfect type of that worldly and practical wisdom which knows how to extract the greatest advantage from this life without overstepping the bounds of caution. He conducts himself so as to drive the best bargain with his fellowmen, and yet he never carries his ambition so far as to provoke the envy of the gods. His code of ethics is the utilitarian. The quality of mercy, which of all the virtues should be the most spontaneous, with him is strained, for he himself baldly acknowledges that his compassion for Ajax has a selfish basis : ¹

“ I commiserate him —
Wretch — notwithstanding that he is my foe,
Bound hand and foot with dire calamity;
Pondering his case no deeper than my own,
Seeing in us all, as many as are alive,
Nothing but phantoms or a fleeting shade.”

Through wide and disagreeable experience he has lost his youthful belief in humanity and has become a sceptic and a cynic, forced to admit that the tongue is mightier than the sword.² In some passages, nevertheless, Sophocles subtly insinuates a certain degree of contempt for this egoistic prudence, reflecting doubtless the feeling of his age. In the Homeric poems is mirrored an unmistakable admiration for the cleverness of Odysseus, even when that cleverness involves dishonesty. Since in those days the struggle for existence was harder, a prince who was not, like Achilles and Ajax, endowed with great physical prowess could use his wits as best he might to further his own ends, without much fear, as long as he was successful, of reprobation from his contemporaries. But now in the fifth century, after the rise of Orphism and of philosophy, there had grown up a loftier conception of life, which set certain absolute ethical standards above the mere advantage of the individual ; and the change of attitude is revealed by the covert scorn of Sophocles for the character of Odysseus.

Both in the *Ajax* and in the *Philoctetes* he emphasizes the timidity for which the lively intelligence of Odysseus compensated. In order to make clear his cowardice, which has never been sufficiently emphasized, I analyze briefly the significant scenes. At the beginning of the former play he turns the white feather when Athena summons the raving Ajax

¹ *Ajax*, 121-126.

² *Phil.* 96-99.

from the tent.¹ No sooner has she mentioned her intention than with a frightened outcry he begs her to refrain. Although she bids him be silent, accuses him definitely of δειλία, and seeks to calm his fear, he reiterates twice his supplication. Even when Athena repeats her assurance that she will darken the vision of Ajax so that he shall not recognize his enemy,² Odysseus gives only a reluctant consent with the optative μένοιμ' ἄν, and ends by comically wishing himself, in any case, somewhere else. I am convinced, as I shall later seek to demonstrate,³ that Sophocles meant to represent Odysseus in this scene a poltroon to the point of the ludicrous. Throughout the *Philoctetes* he shrinks from confronting the protagonist, as when at the beginning he gives the command to Neoptolemus :

“ Send therefore
Your follower to scout, lest unawares
He fall on me; for he would like to get me,
Rather than all the Argives, in his power.”⁴

Towards the end of this same play Sophocles goes even further in depicting the disagreeable qualities of Odysseus, when he makes him resort to the final means of all cowards, — tattling : baffled at the determination of Neoptolemus to restore the bow, he threatens him with carrying the information to the Greek host.⁵ The cowardice of Odysseus is, of course, only another aspect of his practical wisdom, which finds prudence to be the better part of valor ; but Sophocles clearly shows the contempt in which he holds such an attitude towards life by thus debasing him in some places into an actual object of ridicule and by the splendid concluding refusal of Neoptolemus to subscribe to the doctrine that the end justifies the means :

¹ *Ajax*, 71 ff.

² E. Richard (*De interpolatione fabulae Soph. quae inscribitur Ajax*, p. 14) betrays, like so many commentators, a lamentable lack of dramatic sensibility, when he wantonly deletes lines 68–70, because, forsooth, lines 83–85 embody the same promise of the goddess. The repetition is a clever device of Sophocles to stress the cowardice of Odysseus, who must be quieted by a double assurance.

³ Cf. below, p. 121.

⁴ *Phil.* 45–47.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1257–1258:

“ Nay, I will let you be.
Rather will I depart and tell the tale
To the whole army, which shall punish you.”

Odysseus. "You neither say nor seek to do things wise."

Neoptolemus. "If acts are just, they are better than if wise."¹

The noble son of Achilles simply voices here the poet himself, and Antigone represents another phase of the same exalted philosophy of life when she subordinates the advantage of the state to piety.

With this one exception of Odysseus, the prominent characters in the Sophoclean drama live in a heroic atmosphere. Studying, to be sure, nature itself, Sophocles dissects the passions of ordinary existence, but he then magnifies them in order to bring them into harmony with the loftier spirit of tragedy. He examines the manifestations of constancy in the world about him and then heightens it to accord with the natures of Antigone and Electra. He analyzes the instances of resentment against enemies with which he comes into contact, and then idealizes this quality to be the foundation of the character of Philoctetes. He inspects the examples of short-sighted political action that Athens offers so copiously, and then purges it of all mean concomitants that it may befit, in the *Antigone*, the personality of the lordly Creon. However sublime the characters of Sophocles, they are never unreal, since the starting-point is always actuality. Shakspeare follows the same method in some of his plays, especially in the Roman tragedies. In *Antony and Cleopatra* he presents an apotheosis of the erotic passion by uniting it to the nobility of the peerless twain from whom the work takes its name. So in *Othello*, he takes what he has learned from a study of the different manifestations of jealousy and refines this passion of all baser alloy until it is pure enough to be amalgamated with the temperament of the heroic Moor. The character of Ajax, though the other circumstances are almost as diverse as can be, affords a curious and instructive analogy to that of Othello. Both are heroic children. Sophocles adopts the traditional view of his protagonist's nature, which, beginning with Homer, enjoys a long vogue even down into Elizabethan times with Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. His heroic qualities are, chiefly, his prowess, which throughout Greek literature is conceived as second only to that of Achilles, and his high ideals, which reveal themselves, for instance, in his depression after he has come to himself and realizes the absurdity of his crazed onslaught upon the herds. His childishness consists principally in his unrestrained emotions, which

¹ *Phil.* 1245-1246.

when he is thwarted plunge him in a delirium of rage. Even in Homer, who compares him to a donkey,¹ he has the stubbornness of a child; in the Sophoclean drama it is the virtue of this vice that helps to keep him steadfast, against all supplications, to his purpose of suicide. Finally, he is marked by the sensitiveness of a boy, cut at once to the quick by the unfair treatment from his fellow generals. He has the ready and trustful affections of youth,² and one of his greatest sorrows is his betrayal by his former friends, the Atridae, and his resulting loss of confidence in the whole institution of friendship :³

“I for my own part having learnt of late
Those hateful to us we are not to hate
As though they might not soon be friends again,
Intend to measure, now, the services
I render to my friend, as if not so
To abide forever; for of mortals most
Find friendship an unstable anchorage.”

He acts with the unreflecting passion of a lad,⁴ but his physical might

¹ *Iliad*, XI, 558 ff.

² Cf. his love of his followers, lines 330, 349-350.

³ *Ajax*, 678-683.

⁴ Athena's description of *Ajax* in the Sophoclean drama might seem to contradict partly this description (lines 118-120):

ὄρᾱς, Ὀδυσσεύ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχυρὸν ὄση;
τούτου τίς ἂν σοι τάνδρὸς ἦ προνούστερος,
ἢ δρᾶν ἀμείνων ἡνέβη τὰ καίρια;

But the goddess here with the adjective *προνούστερος* alludes rather to his former sanity, contrasted with his actual madness; or if the word is to be interpreted in its literal sense, as referring to presence of mind, we shall simply have to say that it violates the idea of Ajax which is maintained in all other parts of the play. There are, to be sure, one or two passages in the *Iliad* where Ajax might seem to possess the virtue of prudence. He boasts (VII, 197-198) that no one could put him to flight through might or through *ἰδρῆν*; but the word here evidently means only military skill, and in any case is simply used for the sake of a contrast with *βίη*. In another instance (VII, 288-289) Hector recognizes in his adversary both *βίην* and *πινυτήν*. At first sight it might appear that he was praising his wisdom in ceasing the combat at nightfall, but we are then led into the absurd conclusion that he is praising his strength for the same reason. The true interpretation of *πινυτήν* is again military skill; the purport of Hector's words is that because he admits the prowess and cleverness of Ajax in battle his enemy may stop fighting for the day without incurring dishonor. The idea that Ajax was more brave and chivalrous than wise became more and more emphasized in later literature, until Thersites in Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida* can speak of him as a kind of pugilist or muscular numskull (cf. especially Act II, scene 1).

and nobility of mind transform him into a heroic lad.¹ Likewise, Othello has the simple emotions and the impetuosity of a child, an unreflecting and confiding friendship for Cassio and Iago, and a heart as easily wounded, and yet he, too, is conceived on the grand scale. There is nothing complex about the bravery and love of Ajax and Othello, both are rushed into madness by jealousy of different sorts, and yet each gives concrete expression to his jealousy in a heroic manner, one by depriving himself of life, the other by depriving himself of what is more than life.

Through such an ideation of characters Sophocles seems to have created a new dramatic type, the heroic maiden. The two great examples in his extant tragedies are Antigone and Electra. In this element of his art he is not a product of his age but far in advance of it, for in Periclean Athens women did not enjoy a position much superior to that of the Orient. Perhaps he had in mind the nobler women of Sparta. In any case, the invention betokens on the part of Sophocles an interest in the feminine character. He was so devoted to delineation that, not satisfied with the study of the masculine temperament, he wished to go further and depict every aspect of life. His skill enabled him to make Antigone and Electra not only exponents of will-power but at the same time, as I have sought to demonstrate, true women. Aeschylus had revealed himself a masterful interpreter of the feminine temperament in the Danaids of the *Suppliants* and in the Clytaemnestra of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, but Sophocles is an even more interested observer of the other sex, simply because he was such an ardent student of character that he wanted to leave none of its phases unexplored. One manifestation of this tendency is the creation of the woman heroic in virtue, whose like does not reappear in art of any kind until Tintoretto creates his majestic feminine figures. Another is that he was perhaps the first to make the erotic motive principal in his lost *Phaedra*. Nay, the chief motive of the *Trachiniae* may be called erotic, since it is the amorous jealousy of Deianira that leads her to send the fatal robe to Heracles. Nothing, of course, according to your modern literary critic, ever has an actual beginning, and so I suppose we must say that

¹ The *ῥμο-* of the compound adjectives *ῥμοκρατής* (205), *ῥμόθυμον* (885), and *ῥμόφρων* (931) is to be interpreted in the sense of rough and untutored rather than of savage.

Aeschylus in his *Agamemnon* just falls short of allowing the erotic motive to dominate, for although Clytaemnestra's love of Aegisthus and jealousy of Cassandra cause the catastrophe, Aeschylus does not dwell much upon the springs of action but emphasizes rather the gruesomeness of her crime. Sophocles reveals the same interest finally by carefully elaborating, in distinction from the heroic type, many characteristically feminine rôles: Chrysothemis and Ismene, symbols of timidity and indecision; Tecmessa in the *Ajax* marked by anxious conjugal and maternal affection and a proper womanly concern for her future position in case of her husband's death; Antigone in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, exemplifying the tender devotion that only a daughter can bestow.

Sophocles introduced upon the Attic stage not only the heroic maiden but also the noble-minded and ingenuous youth. The chief examples are Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* and Hyllus in the *Trachiniae*, who are very similar to each other. The Orestes of Aeschylus can hardly be reckoned in this class, laden as he is with matricide and sunk beneath the gloom of an ancestral curse. The qualities of Neoptolemus I have already outlined. Hyllus is not so powerful a personality, but cast in the same mould, — the ephebe who can harbor no base thoughts, whose principal trait is his utter filial devotion, quick at the opening of the play to hasten to Heracles' assistance, loath at the end to ignite the funeral pyre, even though it means his father's deliverance. Haemon, although he does not act so prominent a rôle, in the few glimpses vouchsafed by Sophocles, is seen to belong to the same high category of heroic youths, hating Creon's injustice, loving Antigone even unto death.

The personages of Sophocles are truly tragic not only because they are built on majestic lines, but also because — to put it bluntly — the good are not wholly good, nor the bad wholly bad. The latter class I have already discussed,¹ and we may now properly consider the former, about whom the action centers. The protagonist must be human in that he is touched by our infirmities, both for the sake of seeming real and for the sake of supplying a moral impetus to the action. His constitution must be essentially pure and noble but commingled with some alloy which is refined away by the progress of the play. This principle is so generally acknowledged as fundamental in tragedy that it needs no further elucidation than an allusion to one or two traditional ex-

¹ Cf. above, pp. 91-92.

amples.¹ Hamlet's noble heart, of which Horatio speaks, suffers from indecision; in him

"the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

The various incidents of the play serve to exhibit the defect, but the trials through which the prince has to pass, those "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" also teach him the unhappy consequences of his sin, and, in the end, when he finally strikes at his uncle, are seen to have acted like a kind of surgical measure, an *ἄκος τομαίων*, as Aeschylus would say, in cutting away the disease. Lear's kingly graces are contaminated by the baser metal of conceit and the foibles of age, such as irritability and childish folly; the action of the play reveals these but also removes them, leaving him at the conclusion purified of all evil, a shattered old man humbling himself even before his daughter Cordelia.

Sophocles adheres closely to this theory of tragedy, which constitutes his second principle of construction. The dramatic action has as a fundamental purpose the testing of the protagonist's will, but in the process it also achieves a purification of that will. Whether in the beginning the will was centered upon a righteous determination or otherwise, in the end it has been so far freed from the encumbering effect of whatever was ignoble in the soul that in the future it will burn with a bright and pure flame. Lest the objection be made that the modern critic, with his idea of regeneration through suffering, is reading the thoughts of his own age into the past, I quote two lines from the superb passage at the end of the *Philoctetes*, in which Sophocles himself puts into the mouth of Heracles this principle as one of those by which the protagonist should guide his life:

καὶ σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν,
ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον.

For Sophocles, who thought of the drama primarily as a mode of presenting to the public his studies in character, such a conception of

¹ Aristotle (*Poetics*, xiii) likewise claims that a character should be neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but on the different ground that their downfall would arouse neither pity nor fear. The phrase that he employs would suggest that he did not even demand that the protagonist be essentially good and noble, ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ. The frailty in his nature is described by the words, ἀμαρτίαν τινά.

tragedy would have the additional merit of enabling him to trace the catastrophe and its attendant suffering not to chance but to elements in the protagonist's personality. A third principle of Sophoclean construction may thus be discerned: the dramatic action not only tests and purifies the will, but also supplies the retribution for its transgressions. His hero in some wise has sinned, and the development of the plot, which demonstrates to the audience through a series of tests the essential force of will that justifies his position as protagonist, also punishes him for the sin and finally cleanses him of its stain. In this three-fold purpose lies the secret of the Sophoclean drama, and by these three reasons may be explained the introduction of virtually all the different incidents.

Of this purification and punishment the first palpable example is afforded by the *Ajax*. Sophocles does not leave unexplained Athena's hostility and the misfortunes of his hero, but actually invents, or at least draws from sources not extant, a motive in his presumption against heaven, the peculiarly Hellenic vice of *ἴβρις*. Twice he has sinned, boasting, when he left home, that only weaklings require the aid of heaven, and later in battle, offending particularly Athena, by scorning her proffered assistance. He has erred on a magnificent scale, but yet he has erred. Of this *ἴβρις* he is purged by the events of the play—first, the horrible mockery of finding that by this very divine power, which he has spurned, his sword has been directed not against the sons of Atreus, but against dumb and innocent beasts, second, the reaction to calm reason that ensues upon his burst of violence, and third, the realization of the helplessness of men in the hands of gods, which is forced upon him by the anticipation of his inevitable suicide and is expressed by him in his final splendid address to his friends: ¹

“ All things obscure the slow uncounted hours
Bring forth to light, and cover all things plain;
And nothing is so strange it may not be,
But the stern oath — ay, and the stubborn mind
Yield

Wherefore in future we must learn to bend
Before the Gods, and try to reverence
The sons of Atreus. They are lords of us,

¹ *Ajax*, 646 ff.

And we must needs give way to them. How else?
For even things terrible and exceeding strong
Do homage to the worthier; thus is it
Snow-laden winters pass away before
Fair-fruited summer-time; Night's gloomy round
Gives place anon to the white steeds of Day
To blaze with lustre; the fell blast of winds
Can make cessation in the roaring main;
And Sleep, the universal vanquisher,
Sets free the captives he enchained, at last.
And who are we, that we should not learn wisdom?"

In this much discussed passage I am convinced that Ajax is in the main sincere, though he purposely uses ambiguous language in order to deceive his concubine and followers into the belief that he is going to live on in subjection to the Atridae. What he really means is that he has indeed learned the wisdom of bending to human and divine authority but that he will manifest his submission by the nobler way of taking his own life and thus prevent himself from longer constituting an obstacle to the Atridae's sovereignty. The frightful curses that he heaps upon them at his death¹ do not contradict this interpretation, for the injustice of the decree about the award of arms, even though he has formally acknowledged that it should rightly be obeyed, still rankles in his breast. By bitter experience he has learned to honor authority in the abstract, but the personal exemplars of that authority he can still hate. Inasmuch as in this early play Sophocles desires to render perfectly clear his conception of tragedy, he boldly causes the seer, Calchas, to state that Ajax is punished for *ὑβρις*, and the hero himself definitely to acknowledge his change of heart. The words which the messenger says Tiresias used are an unmistakable declaration of the theory of retribution:²

"For till this day is done — such was his rede —
The wrath of great Athena strikes at him.
'For lives presumptuous and unprofitable
Fail beneath sore misfortunes wrought by Heaven,'
The seer declared, 'whenever seed of man
Ceases to think as fits humanity.'"

¹ *Ajax*, 835 ff.

² *Ibid.* 756 ff.

In his later works he is more subtle, not always stating so directly his own idea, but allowing the audience to glean it for themselves from the words and deeds of his personages.

The cases of the *Antigone* and the *Electra* are not so plain. The inflexibility of Antigone carries with it as a natural concomitant a certain harshness manifested in her intolerant attitude towards her sister, especially when the latter offers to share her fate. Electra is somewhat querulous and pessimistic, accusing her absent brother of forgetfulness and unfaithfulness to his trust.¹ For these venial sins the woes endured by the maidens may partially be conceived as a punishment, but it must be admitted that Antigone and Electra are to a great extent victims of the hereditary curse, visited for the sins of their fathers. Sophocles also abandons here, apparently, his principle of purification, unless it is supposed that the sorrowful and regretful mood in which Antigone departs this life betokens a more chastened spirit. Inasmuch as the *Trachiniae* is not constructed upon the usual system of tests, neither is a strict application of the theories of chastisement and purification to be expected. According to modern ideas the page of Heracles' life is certainly flecked with enough amorous vagaries, but it is doubtful whether to the Greek mind, which condoned such peccadilloes in a great hero and willingly granted to Odysseus his Calypso, these caprices would have appeared serious enough to require so severe a punishment as the agony of Mt. Oeta. Even if Sophocles had no apotheosis in mind,² yet the release and repose promised to Heracles by Zeus compel a belief that his long labors and culminating tortures are conceived to have left him free from mortal taint. But the same Hellenic attitude, thinking Deianira no more justified in her jealousy than Penelope, may have magnified what seems to us a very pardonable fault in a woman so provoked. Although with noble generosity she glosses over her husband's inconstancies and merely sends him a magic robe which she trusts will win back his fickle affections, yet the Greeks may have judged that she gave way too readily to jealousy, that she should have be-thought herself of the hostility of Nessus from whom she had received the love-charm, and that she should not have allowed her passion to

¹ *Electra*, 100-101, 167-168, and 319.

² Cf. Jebb's introduction to his edition of the play, p. xxxi.

precipitate her in unreflecting action. And so for the ancients Deianira, who is the true protagonist of the tragedy, may have deserved her fate.

In the other extant works of Sophocles his scheme is more apparent. The nature of Philoctetes is marred by a great bitterness of temperament engendered by the ancient and continued injustices to him and by his long suffering. He has absorbed some of the savageness of the wild creatures with whom he has consorted, calling down upon Odysseus and the Atridae, for example, the same ills that have been his own portion.¹ His resentment towards his enemies at first refuses to honor even the express dictates of heaven, declared in the oracle given at Troy. Neoptolemus in plain terms declares to him his failing, using the very word which means to have become savage, *ἡγρίωσαι*:²

“But you are savage, and reject advice,
If a man warn you kindly; deeming him
For very hate, an adversary and foe.”

Neoptolemus also shows what the sin of Philoctetes had been when he declares to him the moral of his suffering: *ὦ τᾶν, διδάσκου μὴ θρασύνεσθαι κακοῖς*.³ Philoctetes is a prototype of Calderón's great creation, Segismundo, in *La vida es sueño*. In the Spanish play the prince has been cast into a deserted wilderness by his father, in terror of the havoc which it had been predicted he would wreak upon the kingdom, and like the Greek hero he has acquired the savagery of his environment. Restored to the court, by reason of such training he bids fair to fulfil the prophecies, just as Philoctetes manifests the results of his exile in his attitude towards Odysseus, and it is found necessary to banish him again to the dreary solitude. Segismundo, however, has learned his lesson from the ordeal and finally is transformed into the ideal sovereign. But in both Philoctetes and Segismundo the resentful potentiality is innate and might have developed even in less provoking circumstances; and they are truly tragic characters because they are victims not only of malignant fate but of their own shortcomings. The very adversity into which they have fallen is partly a punishment for their evil traits. The redemption of Segismundo by the ordeal through which he has to pass in the course of the dramatic action is evident to the most casual observer; the redemption of Philoctetes is no less

¹ *Phil.* 275, 315-316.

² *Ibid.* 1321-1323.

³ *Ibid.* 1387.

certain, though not so palpable. The awful afflictions to which he is subjected in the play itself, by the maltreatment of Odysseus and the theft of his precious bow, perhaps finally begin to shatter his hitherto unrelenting hatred; and in any case the gentler qualities with which in distinction from the Euripidean Philoctetes¹ he is graced from the opening of the play, in the face of the constant kindness of Neoptolemus, gradually get the upper hand. The more pliable condition into which he has been brought at the end is revealed in his growing willingness to accept the proposals of Neoptolemus. Differing from the commentators upon this tragedy, I interpret the last discussion with the son of Achilles as betokening in Philoctetes a tendency to yield. Immediately after the long persuasive speech of Neoptolemus he plainly wavers:²

“ Detested life !

Why dost thou hold me above ground, yet seeing,
O why not let me go, down to the grave?
Alas, what shall I do? How can I be
Deaf to his words, my friendly counsellor?
Am I to yield, then? ”

Although in the end he refuses to return to Troy and thus attains a final formal victory of the will, the decision was evidently only by a hair's breadth, and even if Heracles had not appeared and bestowed divine sanction upon the pleading of Neoptolemus, Philoctetes might easily the next instant have altered his determination. His tendency to yield is cleverly intimated by his uniform employment in the final dialogue of interrogations instead of direct assertions:³

Neoptolemus. All that you say is fair; still, I desire
That trusting to the Gods, and to my story,
You would consent to sail, and leave this land,
Under my friendly convoy.

Philoctetes. What, to Troy?
To the detested son of Atreus?
With this unlucky foot?

Neoptolemus. Rather, to those
Who shall relieve you and this ulcerous limb
From torment, and redeem you from disease.

Philoctetes. O sayer of strange things, what words are these?

Neoptolemus. What will end well, O know, for both of us.

¹ Cf. above, p. 76.

² *Phil.* 1348-1352.

³ *Ibid.* 1373 ff.

- Philoctetes.* And in saying this have you no dread of Heaven?
Neoptolemus. What dread should a man have, of profiting?
Philoctetes. Profit to me or the Atridae?
Neoptolemus. Why
 To you; being friendly, and my advice the same.
Philoctetes. Friendly, and want to give me to my foes?
Neoptolemus. O sir, learn to be prudent, in your troubles.
Philoctetes. I know that you will ruin me, by this tale.
Neoptolemus. I shall not; but I say, you grow no wiser.
Philoctetes. Do I not know the Atridae cast me out?
Neoptolemus. But how if they will bring you safely back?
Philoctetes. To behold Troy? Never, with my good will!

In the one sentence that is not a question Philoctetes appears almost convinced :

ὁλεῖς με, γινώσκω σε, τοῖσδε τοῖς λόγοις.

It may, then, be concluded that his purification through his sufferings has taken place even before the intervention of heaven.

Sophocles may have conceived Philoctetes as disfigured by a more serious defect. There existed a tradition, preserved by Servius¹ and followed by the moralizing Fénelon in his *Télémaque*,² that in his youth he had disregarded the injunction of Heracles to keep secret the place of the demigod's sepulchre. Although Sophocles makes no mention of it in the play, he perhaps had the idea that his hero was punished because of this sin, for he is not always careful about his exposition.³

Both in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Oedipus Coloneus* Sophocles thinks of a king excessively headstrong. Like Antigone, Oedipus has the vice of the virtue of an iron will, although the defect assumes a different expression. Reliance upon the will carries with it in Antigone a certain harshness; it rushes Oedipus into heedless action, and often takes the form of violent temper. The claim is sometimes made that he is the innocent victim of a hereditary curse.⁴ No interpretation is further

¹ Comment to *Aen.* III, 402.

² Book XII.

³ The scholiast mentions a tradition that Philoctetes paid the penalty of repelling the proffered love of Chryse. If Sophocles knew of it, he avoided it because it would have made the protagonist appear the victim rather of his virtue.

⁴ A sensible yet unconvincing exposition of this theory is found in the *Rückblick* at the end of the Wolff-Bellermann editions of both plays.

from the truth, for the poet is too much concerned with seeking causes in human character ever to allow a *dénouement* to rest wholly upon fate. The catastrophe of the former tragedy is to be traced partly to the doom overhanging the Labdacidae, but Sophocles finds a reason also in the very nature of Oedipus. It is predestined that he shall slay his father, but the crime is derived also from his quickness to anger. He was, to be sure, unconscious of his father's identity and had himself been first provoked; but when he had already been warned by heaven of a possible patricide he should not have allowed himself to be moved by his reckless temperament but should have stopped to reflect. He himself acknowledges that he acted through wrath.¹ His same passionate spirit, expressing itself now in the sphere of love, hurried him into a marriage, the dire consequences of which might have been averted, had he waited to investigate. He violated the Greek virtue of moderation, and in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* he has to pay the price. He is overhasty in entertaining a suspicion of Creon, which even the proverbially timid chorus stigmatize as the result of an excited mood.² His irritability is repeatedly manifested and explicitly mentioned in the play. He flies into a rage at Tiresias; and Creon, as he leaves the stage, definitely declares to him his fault and its consequences:³

“ You display your spleen
In yielding; but, when your wrath passes bound,
Are formidable! Tempers such as yours
Most grievous are to their own selves to bear,
Not without justice.”

The horrors at the end of the first play begin to break his spirit, but it requires all the long years of wretched exile before his chastening is complete. Even in the old man of the *Oedipus Coloneus*, as in *King Lear*, there is something of spleen left, which is encountered and recognized by Creon:⁴

θυμοῦ γὰρ οὐδὲν γῆρας ἔστιν ἄλλο πλὴν
θανεῖν.

¹ *O. T.* 807.

² *Ibid.* 523-524, 617.

³ *Ibid.* 673-675.

⁴ *O. C.* 954-955; cf. for similar remarks from Creon, 804-805 and 852-855.

His curse upon his son Polynices would not be regarded by the Greeks so much an outbreak of anger as the righteous action of a father,¹ but in the previous scene when he is persuaded to receive his son, even the devoted daughter Antigone accuses him of the sin of anger and traces to it all his ills:²

“O let him come! Others have bad sons too
And keen resentments; but, on being advised,
They are charmed in spirit by the spells of friends.
Look to the past, not to the present; all
That you endured through mother and through sire;
If you regard it, you will find, I know,
That harmful passion ends in further harm.
You have reminders of it far from slight,
Maimed of your sightless eyes.”

To his ancient failing, which he himself now very naturally but very tragically fails to recognize,³ he has added in this play a nervous and querulous anxiety which is the effect of his long sufferings. This irritability manifests itself in constant and importunate petitions for the protection which has already been promised him, until Theseus is aroused into reproving him.⁴ Despite these smouldering embers, the old fire is almost extinguished, as may be observed at the very beginning in the crushed humility with which the erstwhile haughty sovereign meets the objections of the chorus to his sojourn at Colonus, and again when yielding to the persuasive words of Theseus and Antigone he consents

¹ It is remarkable that in all the modern versions of the *Oedipus Coloneus* by Ducis, Chénier, and Niccolini, who balk at the sternness of Greek ethics, the father relents, regrets his curse, and is reconciled with his son. In Ducis Polynices can be pardoned with more reason since there has been no oracle directing him to gain possession of Oedipus' body, and he is actuated merely by a longing for forgiveness. With Niccolini, the existence of the oracle makes him more selfish and the reconciliation, therefore, less logical. Chénier seeks to render him a more estimable character by representing him as persuaded by the thorough villain Eteocles to expel his father from Thebes. All these dramatists, however, are forced into the unnatural expedient of depicting divinity as less merciful than the man, Oedipus, for the Eumenides refuse to accept Polynices' repentance and drive him away on his sinister expedition against his brother.

² *O. C.* 1192-1200.

³ *Cf. Ibid.* 966-968.

⁴ *Ibid.* 648-656, 1206-1210.

to receive Polynices ; and at the conclusion, in his august apotheosis he is to be regarded as purified of all earthly foibles.

There are one or two other points germane to Sophocles' psychological analysis which need passing mention. With the exception of this process of purification, he seldom presents before the eyes of the audience any further development in character. The personalities are already formed in main outlines as they are to remain throughout the drama. Antigone in the prologue itself exhibits her strong will and devotion to her brother. Neoptolemus hesitates at the deception of Philoctetes from the very beginning. In the *Oedipus Coloneus*, the protagonist is at the first a nobler figure than in the earlier play, conscious of his approaching reconciliation with heaven from the opening scene and already prepared for his translation. Deianira in the *Trachiniae* is the only signal example of an evolution in character, beginning as a trustful wife and only gradually becoming a prey to jealousy.

One of the principal devices that Sophocles employs to define his characters is contrast, often introducing persons of diametrically different temperaments from the protagonists for no other purpose. Ismene is created only to throw Antigone into higher light, and Chrysothemis performs the same office for Electra. To turn to examples where he does not introduce personages merely for the sake of contrast, in the *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus and Odysseus constitute foils to each other, the former standing for the frankness and guilelessness of youth, the latter for craftiness and opportunism. Likewise Ajax and his concubine become more vivid by contrast, since he is controlled by profound motives which are incomprehensible to Tecmessa, the simple woman of the fireside.

The emphasis upon the rôle of human character in producing the dénouement naturally diminishes the importance of the part that the gods had played in the tragedies of Aeschylus. Sophocles acknowledges and alludes to their overruling presence behind the scenes of mortal action, but he seldom brings them forward into the lime light as directing forces. There is little mention of Apollo's agency in the enterprise of Orestes, and Sophocles so far neglects the interference of deity in human destiny that he is not troubled by the religious problem of Orestes' expiation of the matricide. Basing the son's action rather upon character, he omits the long series of Apollo's threatened punish-

ments which it is declared in the *Choephoroi*¹ would follow upon disobedience of the god's behest. Seeing no further than human justice, which pardons the crime of Orestes as a deed of retribution, he does not seek to penetrate the laws of heaven, which require that the avenger must free himself from the stain of blood and purify himself in the sight of the spotless Phoebus. In order partly to sweep away that supernatural mist which had overhung the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles does not employ in the *Ajax* the detail of the myth which we learn from allusions in the scholiast appeared in his predecessor's play upon the same subject, the *Thracian Women*, — the magic invulnerability of Ajax except in a single place. He likewise avoids the supernatural in the *Philoctetes*. Aeschylus, concerned with effects on a grand scale and reckless of slight questions of probability, in his version of the story had somewhat unnaturally represented Philoctetes as failing to recognize Odysseus at once, and is naively excused by Dio Chrysostom² on the ground that the hero's faculties of perception might easily have been impaired by his long suffering. As in the *Electra* Euripides here also criticizes Aeschylus, though indirectly. He confronts Philoctetes with Odysseus, but he shows that he disapproves of the inconsistency in the matter of recognition by causing Athena miraculously to alter the latter's appearance. Sophocles, with a French classic antipathy for *le merveilleux* as a dramatic motive, escapes the difficulty by creating the figure of Neoptolemus for Odysseus to use as a go-between.³ In general he admits formally the instrumentality of the gods, but he then proceeds so to manipulate his material that the dénouement depends solely upon earthly agencies. He thus involves himself in the eternal problem of divine omnipotence and man's free will; if the gods are the arbiters of human action, what part is there left for mortals to play? He does not seem to have essayed any solution of the dilemma, but forges straight

¹ 269 ff.

² LII, 8.

³ Châteaubrun in his *Philoctète* (1755) thinks to approach more the French ideal of *raison*, according to which all must be based on logic and nothing on the supernatural or extraordinary, in representing the hero as wounded not by a divinely ordered serpent but by the poisoned arrow of a Trojan. But, as Lessing has pointed out (*Laocoön*, chap. IV), he really defeats his own purpose, for then there is no reason for abandoning Philoctetes any more than another wounded Greek.

ahead, as if supernatural beings did not exist. Perhaps with his absorbed interest in human character he scarcely realized that there was any problem. The solution he bequeathed to the exponent of the more critical and sceptical tendencies of the age. Euripides decided it by throwing over the gods. He insinuates, nay, bluntly declares that they are sometimes in the wrong. Now, fallible gods are no gods at all, and this is the innuendo of Euripides, so that he would really have his audience understand that man's deeds depend wholly upon his own will. Although, however, he questions whether the gods control human destiny, he does not scruple to employ them as exalted magicians, in order that by a kind of spell they may loose the otherwise inextricable knot into which his personages have wound themselves. The typical *deus ex machina* implies no faith in an overruling Providence, but is merely a claptrap dramatic device rendered effectual by what Euripides himself would have derided as popular superstition. But Sophocles is too religious to descend to any such artificial and ignoble use of the gods. He resorts to the Euripidean expedient in only one of the extant tragedies, the *Philoctetes*, and then not in the ordinary way. The dénouement might have occurred without Olympic intervention, for Philoctetes had already begun to waver under the persuasive kindness of Neoptolemus.¹ Heracles is introduced only that he may patently set the seal of divine approval upon the return to Troy. Aesthetic justice, moreover, demanded his appearance. He had bestowed the arrows upon Philoctetes, and it is proper that he should now authorize their employment against the beleaguered city. Once again Sophocles abides by the classical golden mean. He has not the enthusiastic faith of Aeschylus, who created about himself such an atmosphere of mystic rapture that he necessarily transferred it to his dramas; nor is he distraught by the doubts of Euripides. Here one discovers another justification of the term, the serenity of Sophocles, since he takes life as he finds it, calmly and optimistically, not tormenting himself with questions that are beyond his ken.

¹ Cf. above, p. 104, my interpretation of the final scene.

IV

There are certain other elements of Sophoclean construction which are not so directly linked with his fundamental principle of psychological study. His exposition calls first for consideration. He sometimes adopts the gradual manner of exposition used by Ibsen.¹ Instead of revealing in the first scene, like Euripides in his typical prologue, and like so many modern dramatists, all the circumstances that have preceded the events of the play, he distributes the elucidation throughout, revealing fact after fact, while the action advances, only as they are absolutely required for intelligibility. In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen makes no explicit statement about the heroine's pristine relations with Eilert Lövborg until the second act when they begin to have a definite effect upon the dénouement. It is necessary now to inform the audience that there has existed in the old days a very intimate connection between the two and that Hedda was unable to influence Eilert for good, since in this act she once again seeks to have her hands, as she says, in the man's destiny. In the *Wild Duck* the complete truth about Hjalmar Ekdal's past and about the present conditions in the household is not revealed until the third act. Then it is that the spectator learns of his ambitions about the success of his invention and the rehabilitation of his father's honor, and at the same time of his pitiable weakness in character, just before, through that weakness and through the interference of a friend, the old order of things is to be subverted and tragedy is to ensue.

Sophocles employs the same method in the *Ajax*. At the beginning there is an exposition of the hero's frenzied misdeeds, in order to show the immediate occasion for his suicide, which occurs at about the middle of the action. But since Sophocles wishes to trace also a remote cause in the protagonist's own nature for the misfortunes that culminate in his death, Calchas' arraignment of Ajax for his presumption against Athena and the other gods is recounted at the beginning of the third episode immediately before his final soliloquy. The second part of the play is taken up with the question whether Ajax shall be honorably buried; it is not until now that it is necessary to know the lights and

¹ For a less extensive treatment of this phenomenon, cf. my article on the *Dramatic Art of Aeschylus*, *Harvard Studies in Class. Phil.*, 1905, pp. 56-57.

shadows of his character, so that one may decide what justification there is for and against the sepulchral rites. Sophocles has already been obliged to point out the darker side of his hero in the earlier exposition; he postpones until the conclusion of the play what is to be said in favor of a decent interment by the Greeks. Teucer champions his brother's cause, declaring that neither living nor dead is Ajax the subject of Agamemnon and Menelaus, since it was not under their command that he had joined the Trojan expedition, but as a free lance and his own captain, having bound himself by oath to lend his aid to whomsoever Helen should espouse. He finally relates the great military services which the mighty Ajax had wrought for the Hellenic host, especially his voluntary duel with Hector. His character, therefore, may not be viewed in full perspective, nor the right and wrong motives of his conduct completely understood, until the play is finished. It is towards the end, moreover, that Sophocles, in order to show that the reciprocity of fate was involved in the protagonist's death, reveals at length¹ a circumstance of the suicide at which before he had only hinted:² as Hector had been dragged to death with the girdle presented him by Ajax, so Ajax fell upon the sword that was the gift of the Trojan champion. In the *Trachiniae* there is no allusion to the magic garment which is to slay Heracles, until the wife, stirred to jealousy, determines to send it to him. Finally, not to multiply examples, in the *Oedipus Coloneus* the patricide and incest are only vaguely mentioned³ until the middle of the play, when the protagonist discusses them in full to exculpate himself before Theseus in the face of Creon's vituperation.⁴ In the earlier moments of the action he does not need to make an elaborate defence since no direct accusations have been brought against him.⁵ The more ordinary form of exposition in the modern drama is illustrated by the play on the same theme of the French pseudo-classicist, Chénier, in which Oedipus seeks to justify himself at once by a long account of his past. This gradual manner of exposition carries with it

¹ *Ajax*, 1028 ff. Nauck's rejection of these lines is only another instance of his fantastic textual criticism.

² *Ibid.*, 661-665.

³ *O. C.* 267 ff. and 545 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* 960 ff.

⁵ Cf. Bellermaun's edition of the *O. C.*, *Rückblick*, p. 156.

certain disadvantages. Inasmuch as the whole situation is not made clear at the outset, the progress of the action demands more careful attention from the spectators for comprehension, and obscurity can be avoided only by the most delicate workmanship on the part of the dramatist. There are, however, distinct compensations. The minds of the audience are not bewildered at once with a simultaneously announced heap of data, which they will waste time in extricating. Since the author does not retard the movement at the very beginning by long speeches of mere explanation, he can utilize this space for the more absorbing feature of a progressing action. The whole work gains in naturalism, since the facts are not arbitrarily massed together at the opening, but as in life itself, through the writer's art, seem to be introduced more or less accidentally. The danger of obscurity is at least partly counteracted, because the data, when they are actually presented, impress themselves more upon the hearers' consciousness, appearing at the psychological moment when they have a direct bearing upon the evolution of the plot.¹

Sophocles carries this distributive method still further, dividing into sections even what exposition he gives at the opening of the tragedy. Thus in the prologue to the *Trachiniae* Deianira, in Euripidean fashion, relates her marriage with Heracles directly to the audience; immediately afterward, in the first episode, she addresses to the chorus an account of Heracles' prophecies of his approaching death. The early exposition is much more strikingly distributed between two characters in the *Ajax*. Athena describes the slaughter of the herds in the open country because with divine omniscience she alone was cognizant of the frenzied deed; Tecmessa, since hers was the only mortal eye that had observed them,

¹ A typical example of the modern form of exposition I have chanced to see, as I write these lines, in the English version of Pierre Wolff's *Les marionnettes*, a play almost the only redeeming feature of which is that Nazimova has made the mistake of using it as a vehicle to exhibit her superb histrionic ability. All the exposition is grouped in the first act, which therefore contains little or no movement and would fall flat if it were not for Nazimova's wonderful impersonation of the country and convent bred wife. Sections of the exposition might very effectively have been transferred to later moments in the action. Sophocles, for instance, would have placed the old uncle's account of the heroine's simple and idyllic girlhood in the second act where it would have been much more impressive by contrast with the society woman into which she has now metamorphosed herself.

naturally recounts the deeds of madness within the tent after her lord's return from his nocturnal expedition. The composer of the second part of the argument to this tragedy realizes and comments upon the skilful form of the exposition: "Then enters Tecmessa, the captured concubine of Ajax, knowing that the slaughterer of the herds is Ajax but not to whom the herds belong. Each learns from the other that of which he is ignorant, the chorus from Tecmessa that Ajax perpetrated the slaughter, Tecmessa from the chorus that the herds are the property of the Greeks. . . . He cleverly introduces Athena in the prologue. For it is unnatural that Ajax should come forward and speak of his own deeds, as if accusing himself, and no one else knew what had taken place, since Ajax had acted in secret and during the night. It was then a god's office to elucidate fully the situation." Even Tecmessa's exposition is subdivided. First she pictures a part of the scene in vivid lyric measures,¹ and then relates at length in trimeters,² as in the *ῥῆσις* of a messenger, the whole story of Ajax' departure and reappearance. Such an additional distribution of the exposition makes it seem more casual and thus relieves still further the perfunctory impression which is left with the audience by the ordinary treatment of this element of dramatic technique.

If there is any fault in Sophocles' mode of exposition it is that he is too chary with it. In the *Ajax* the details of the contest for the arms of Achilles are not related, as if, like Aeschylus, Sophocles had composed a *δῶλων κρίσις* as first in a trilogy. For what reason does Antigone return again to her brother's corpse? Must the body be kept covered with dust? Or are the thrice-poured libations necessary to the repose of his soul? At the opening of the *Philoctetes* not enough emphasis is laid upon the point about which the whole action of the drama revolves, the necessity of bringing not only the arrows but the protagonist himself back to Troy. At line 110 Neoptolemus seems to know that he must get possession of Philoctetes, but how he knew we are not told, since no direct statement is made until the speech of the spurious merchant at line 612. Odysseus or the Atridae, of course, must have told him something of the enterprise before the tragedy opens, but in any case it ought to have been made clear to the audience from the first

¹ *Ajax*, 233 ff.

² *Ibid.* 284 ff.

that Philoctetes himself must join the besieging host. Towards the end, at line 1332, it is explicitly declared that the hero must consent to his return. At 612 it has already been hinted that he must be persuaded to this course; but one may then properly ask, why the attempts at force and fraud, which occupy the greater part of the drama? Sophocles himself probably had in mind some reconciliation of these discrepancies, but he is here once more careless about an explanation to his hearers. There might seem to be more excuse for a Greek playwright than a modern, because he could rely upon a partial knowledge of the general mythical outline in his audience, but as I have sought to point out in another place,¹ the very fact that the several writers treated the same myth with varying detail would be likely to cause confusion, as in this instance of the Philoctetes story, and would require even more painstaking exposition than in productions of the present day. If any work of Sophocles had been the second or third in a trilogy one might trust there had been an elaborate elucidation in the first play, but as far as our knowledge goes, he constructed each tragedy to form a separate entity.

Sophocles begins earlier in the story than does Aeschylus. A Greek tragedy, to be sure, depicts only the culmination of a disastrous series of circumstances,² but Sophocles represents upon the stage more of the working out of the catastrophe than does Aeschylus. Their treatment of the Electra myth affords an obvious opportunity for comparison. Aeschylus starts at once with the recognition scene between Orestes and Electra and proceeds to the double murder; Sophocles goes back and pictures at some length the sorrowful vigil of Electra and her relations with her mother and sister. One can imagine Aeschylus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* beginning only with the king's discovery of the ghastly predicament, not tracing, like his successor, the many links in the chain which lead to the revelation. He would have made the first scene of the *Oedipus Coloneus* the entrance of Ismene to unfold to her father the recent happenings at Thebes, not depicting, like Sophocles, the details of Oedipus' arrival at Athens. One of the reasons for this divergence between the methods of the two dramatists is that Aeschylus, coming at an earlier moment in the evolution of tragedy, consumes

¹ Cf. my article on the *Dramatic Art of Aeschylus*, pp. 22-24.

² Cf. *ibid.* pp. 17 ff.

so much time in lyrical passages, in which he comments vividly and picturesquely upon the action, that he cannot represent so much upon the stage. Sophocles, moreover, desires a greater lapse of time, in which his personages may be submitted to the customary series of tests. There is, however, a profounder reason, rooted in the very natures of the two writers: Aeschylus conceives a drama as a single impression of concentrated terror, Sophocles rather as an elaborately and consistently developed plot.

Under the influence of such a conception of tragedy, Sophocles seeks to harmonize all details of the plot with one another and with probability. Aeschylus is less scrupulous about minutiae, intent as he is upon broad and striking theatrical pictures. The notorious instance is found in the *Choephoroi* where Electra surmises her brother's presence through such puerilities as a comparison of a lock of his hair and his footprints with her own.¹ Sophocles brushes away these incongruities, basing the recognition, according to his usual tendency, upon character, causing Electra to divine the truth because of Orestes' more than friendly pity for her, and confirming her conjecture by the sight upon the boy's finger of Agamemnon's ring. There were similar slight defects in the Aeschylean version of the Philoctetes matter. To the failure of the hero to recognize Odysseus and Sophocles' evasion of the difficulty, I have already referred.² I have also touched upon the improbability that the Lemnians by whom the island is inhabited, and of whom the chorus consists, should have left Philoctetes unvisited during the long ten years. Euripides retains the chorus of Lemnians, but he again indirectly criticizes Aeschylus by putting into their mouths an apology for their neglect and seeks greater verisimilitude by bringing upon the stage a certain native, called Actor, who had occasionally sought Philoctetes out. Sophocles skirts the pitfall altogether by leaving Lemnos uninhabited and composing

¹ The actual ἀναγνώρισις a few lines further on may not have been so childish as Euripides in his criticism upon this passage (*El.* 527 ff.) would have us believe. It is possible that Orestes simply showed the place on his head whence the lock had been shorn and produced a garment woven by Electra which he had preserved from his infancy or actually wore another which she had lately sent him. (Cf. ed. of the play by F. Blass, note to line 231.)

² Cf. above, p. 79.

his chorus of Neoptolemus' ship-mates. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* it is indeed irrational that the protagonist has not learned the story of Laius before the play begins, but as Aristotle remarks,¹ the irrational element lies without the tragedy (ἔξω τῆς τραγῳδίας), and the action itself is virtually a perfect mechanism. The improbabilities of Aeschylus are no more shocking than some in Shakspeare, as, for instance, Orlando's failure to discern Rosalind beneath her boyish disguise; but Sophocles, eager that the framework of the plot shall form a perfect structure, will have none of them.

Unlike the playwright of the present day, who can depend upon his elaborate costumes, properties, and scenery, Sophocles has to grapple also with the exposition of what he wishes the audience to understand as the stage picture. There is no exact information as to how far setting and mechanical devices had developed by Sophocles' time; in any case, although he is said to have carried them still further than had Aeschylus, it is certain that they could not be compared to the realistic means which the modern dramatist has at his disposal. The ancient author, therefore, as I have before tried to demonstrate at greater length,² sought to conjure up before the mental vision by means of language those embellishments which the physical eye could not convey. In several instances Sophocles prefers to trust to his ability to arouse the imagination of his listeners. So in the opening lines of the *Electra* the Pedagogue outlines to Orestes the view from the palace at Mycenae:

“ Son of our Captain in the wars of Troy,
Great Agamemnon, it is given thee now
With thine eyes, Orestes, to behold
Those scenes thou hast ever longed for. Here it lies,
Argos, the ancient land of thy desire;
The sacred glade of her the gadfly drove,
Inachus' daughter; that's the Agora
They call Lycean, from the wolf-slaying God;
This, on the left, Hera's renowned fane;
And from the point we are reaching you can swear
You see Mycenae's Golden City, and this,
The death-fraught house of Pelops' family.”

¹ *Poetics*, XV.

² Cf. my article on the *Dramatic Art of Aeschylus*, pp. 24-27.

The double description by Tecmessa, first in lyrics and then in dialogue, of the havoc wrought by Ajax within the tent, is used to inculcate upon the imagination of the spectators the picture which could not be adequately given by the properties when the interior was thrown open to their gaze.¹ Again at the beginning of the *Oedipus Coloneus* there is mention of the laurel, olive, vines, and nightingales at Colonus, with the battlements of Athens in the distance, all of which would have been shown to the audience in a Wagnerian opera, especially the nightingales. Despite the more artistic achievements of modern naturalistic scenery in such productions as the *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Boston Opera House, or the *Martyre de Saint Sébastien* at Paris by the talented Russian, Léon Bakst, our settings are never quite convincing, are often petty, and not seldom ugly; the superiority of the ancient method, where the scene was only suggested, is proved by the New Theatre Company's exquisite performance of the *Winter's Tale*.

Ibsen recalls Sophocles not only in the method of gradual exposition but also in the employment of the last part of the play to discuss the various aspects of the problem involved. In the third act of the *Doll's House*, Ibsen thoroughly thrashes out the whole subject of the proper relation between husband and wife. There is a similar debate upon the questions to which the former course of the drama has given rise at the end of *Rosmersholm*. These topics can be more satisfactorily discussed at the conclusion of the piece, because then both the characters and the audience are in full possession of the facts which have now been finally laid bare by the gradual exposition. Certain works of Sophocles conclude in a similar fashion. The latter half of the *Ajax* concerns itself with an investigation of the good and evil in the hero's constitution. At the end of the tragedy called after him, Philoctetes debates with Neoptolemus the propriety of his own return to Troy and is finally persuaded by the appearance of Heracles, who solemnly pronounces the solution of the problem.

There are certain devices that Sophocles employs to enhance the effect of terror, which, according to Aristotle, is one of the two great

¹ The second account, at 296, is introduced partly in order that Tecmessa's story may not be interrupted by skipping from the departure of Ajax to the recovery of his wits.

desiderata in tragedy. He either foretells or hints at the horrors of the catastrophe before they actually occur, arousing suspense in the spectators. Tiresias in the *Antigone* prophesies the evils that are to befall Creon; in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* he prophesies the king's fate, and Oedipus himself, in calling down imprecations upon the unknown criminal, unconsciously predicts, with an irony that must have delighted a Hellenic audience, his own doom. In the *Trachiniae* Deianira announces almost at once the oracle which proclaims enigmatically the future death of her husband. In the *Ajax* there are many foreshadowings of the suicide before it becomes a reality. The spectator is thus introduced into the atmosphere of terror before the disasters themselves take place, so that when they do come the impression is all the more forceful because it constitutes a kind of climax.

Another device is the sudden and silent disappearance of some woman from the stage after the revelation of a calamity in which she is intimately involved, with the result that the audience are immediately seized by a foreboding that she is going to do herself some injury. So in the *Antigone* Eurydice departs, at the news of her son's death, to stab herself; Jocasta in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as soon as she knows the ghastly truth, to hang herself; Deianira, in the *Trachiniae*, to take her own life in the same fashion, when she learns that unwittingly she has slain her lord. He employs such final exits particularly for women probably because their silence is more striking and more effective in transmitting the feeling of terror by contrast with the outcries and lamentations with which the sex usually express their sorrow.

A third device that Sophocles brings into service in order to increase dramatic tension is the development of a topic through a series of steps. The slow approach to the goal arouses suspense in the same way as the trick of foreshadowing the catastrophe. In the *Electra* the recognition of Orestes by the heroine is accomplished through an elaborate chain of nine separate points of advance towards certainty.¹ She first notices that he grieves at her sorrow; second, that he is troubled by the loss of her beauty and honorable position in the palace; third, she reflects that he is the only mortal who has pitied her; fourth, he commands her to lay down the urn which she supposes to contain his ashes, cleverly bringing into service a concrete object to drive home his meaning;

¹ *El.* 1174 ff.

fifth, he tells her that she does not rightly lament; sixth, becoming more and more definite, he forbids her to call the living dead; seventh, he openly declares that the urn does not contain his remains; eighth, he announces that Orestes lives; and ninth, he reveals his identity. By a similar progression Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* is cajoled into the deception of the hero.¹ Odysseus first outlines to him the principle that the end justifies the means; he then adds the consideration that Troy cannot be captured without the arrows of Philoctetes, which can be obtained only through this strategem; and he finally persuades Neoptolemus by tempting him with the promises of a reputation for wisdom and valor. The reconversion of the young man to the path of virtue is also attained by a series of stages, distributed through the central part of the drama. Philoctetes first wins his affection by praising his father, Achilles;² next, he makes him blush for his treachery by showing such confidence as to trust him with the precious bow;³ Neoptolemus is then moved to deeper pity by the actual sight of one of Philoctetes' paroxysms;⁴ since it is a natural human instinct to love what one is called upon to protect, and since, as Macbeth realizes when he murders Duncan, nothing is more calculated to touch the human heart than an innocent asleep, this compassion would be augmented when he watches over the heavy slumber that ensues upon the convulsion;⁵ in adding the final dram to weigh down the balance on the side of kindness, Sophocles again shows himself an expert psychologist since, realizing the universal truth that acts of corporal mercy not only benefit the receiver but open the deeper wells of compassion in the doer, he causes Neoptolemus to minister to the suffering Philoctetes and thus to be stirred to the culminating deed of charity, the revelation of the whole fabric of deceit.⁶ We have Neoptolemus' own twice repeated words for proof that the sense of shame has gradually been fermenting in his heart:

αἰσχρὸς φανούμαι· τοῦτ' ἀνιώμαι πάλαι,⁷

and again:

λυπηρῶς δὲ μὴ⁸

πέμπω σε μάλλον, τοῦτ' ἀνιώμαι πάλαι.

¹ *Phil.* 96 ff.

³ *Ibid.* 662 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.* 826 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.* 906.

² *Ibid.* 336 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* 730 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.* 865 ff.

⁸ *Ibid.* 912-913.

Another excellent instance of this advance by degrees is the reluctant acknowledgment by Lichas in the *Trachiniae* of the real position, in the household, of Iole, the maiden whom Heracles has brought back captive.¹ Half the power of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* depends upon the dramatic tension aroused by the subtly graduated unfolding of the mystery.

As a device to stress by contrast the tragic, Sophocles introduces here and there the comic. I need not rehearse the stock examples of the guard in the *Antigone*, the messenger in the *Trachiniae*, and the Corinthian in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. To these I add a passage which, I am convinced, is to be interpreted humorously, in order that I may aid in removing what seems to me a common misapprehension of Greek tragedy as something too pure and austere to be marred by contact with the less exalted aspects of existence; even Sophocles, who ordinarily avoids the meanness of life, does not scruple to bring humor into service. The cowardice of Odysseus at the beginning of the *Ajax* must have been comic.² When Athena upbraids him he still plays the poltroon, begging her not to call the madman forth: ἀλλ' ἔνδον ἀρκείτω μένων. To Athena's questions, τί μὴ γένηται; πρόσθεν οὐκ ἀνὴρ ὄδ' ἦν; he replies, amusingly employing the word ἀνὴρ in another sense:

ἐχθρός γε τῷδε τάνδρῃ καὶ τανῦν ἔτι.

When she reminds him that it is sweet to laugh at enemies, he answers that such an attitude is all very well but it is enough for him that Ajax remain within, reiterating his former words:

ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀρκεῖ τοῦτον ἐν δόμοις μένειν.

Reluctantly consenting at last to stay, he still whispers for the audience's benefit:

μένοιμ' ἄν· ἤθελον δ' ἄν ἐκτὸς ὦν τυχεῖν.

When the raving Ajax has appeared, Sophocles uses Athena's definite query about his treatment of Odysseus and his violent reply in order that by a pantomime of fright the son of Laertes may gratify the spectators' sense of humor:

AΘ. εἶεν, τί γὰρ δὴ παῖς ὁ τοῦ Λαερτίου,
ποῦ σοι τύχης ἔστηκεν; ἢ πέφευγέ σε;

ΑΙ. ἦ τοῦπίτριπτον κίναδος ἐξήρου μ' ὅπου;

¹ *Trach.* 393 ff.

² *Ajax*, 74 ff.

The advantage of such lively touches is proved by the coldness and artificiality of the imitations of Sophocles in classic French drama or in Alfieri, which studiously exclude the comic as inharmonious to the lofty tone of tragedy. For a similar purpose of contrast Sophocles often manipulates the plot so that the chorus shall be deceived into false hopes just before the catastrophe and shall express their joy in a merry dance or hyporcheme. The examples in the extant dramas are the belief in the *Ajax* that the hero has foregone his purpose of suicide,¹ the expectation that because Creon has relented Antigone will be saved,² the delight in the *Trachiniae* at the return of Heracles before his plight is known,³ and in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the rejoicing at the solution of the enigma before the real truth has dawned upon them.⁴

Sophocles also likes to set his play against a broader background of space and time than that of the actual myth represented. In the *Philoctetes* the prospect is widened to include the whole Trojan War, for such a purpose seems to be one of the chief reasons for the introduction of the protagonist's long series of questions about the different princes who took part in the expedition,⁵ a passage that has no direct office in the development of the plot. The replies of Neoptolemus give to the audience a kind of panorama of the events since the beginning of hostilities.⁶ So in the *Ajax* the outlook is expanded to cover the whole Hellenic encampment by a description of the uproar that ensued upon the return of Teucer.⁷ Sophocles felt the need of these more extended vistas, because he did not have the advantage of conceiving a play as part of a trilogy. With the same spirit in the *Trachiniae* he causes Heracles to recount his twelve labors,⁸ and Hyllus to describe the present condition of his grandmother, Alcmena.⁹ The dramas of Sophocles thus assume more august dimensions; the audience receive an impression of grandeur beyond the mere scope of the events depicted before their eyes.

¹ *Ajax*, 693 ff.

³ *Trach.* 633 ff.

⁵ *Phil.* 410 ff.

² *Ant.* 1115 ff.

⁴ *O. T.* 1086 ff.

⁶ Other justifications of this passage are its possible political innuendo (cf. Ad. Schöll, *Sophokles*, 309 ff.) and its appeal to the literary knowledge of the spectators, who were tickled at allusions which they could comprehend from their reading of Homer; cf. also above, p. 90.

⁷ *Ajax*, 719 ff.

⁸ *Trach.* 1046 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.* 1151 ff.

I may not conclude without a word upon the dramatic significance of Sophocles' contributions to the evolution of tragedy. Over such innovations as the increase of the chorus from twelve to fifteen, the extension of theatrical properties and scenery, and the development of the musical accompaniment, we need not stop. A more important innovation was the addition of a third actor. It is remarkable that although Sophocles brings three persons together upon the stage at the same moment, he seldom unites them in one dialogue. When at the end of the *Ajax* Odysseus appears and enters into the vehement dispute in which Agamemnon and Teucer have been involved, the latter relapses into a silence that is most unnatural upon a question in which he has just shown himself so vitally concerned. Pylades, in the *Electra*, though he is addressed, is stupidly mute. The captive maiden Iole in the *Trachiniae* preserves a silence which Sophocles explains by her overwhelming grief, but the real reason for which, as Clayton Hamilton would tell us, according to his tendency to explain the whole drama by the exigencies of the stage,¹ is that the author was loath to introduce a third person into the discussion. Sophocles' pretext, however, makes it evident that he was conscious of the defect and still did not dare as yet to fly in the face of convention. Even at the end of his career, in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, Antigone suddenly withdraws from the dialogue when Ismene appears upon the stage; and, on the other hand, when the two sisters have been restored to their father by Theseus, it is only Antigone who expresses her joy. Sophocles is thus reticent because he has not quite learned how to employ the third actor effectively and because he does not wish to break too violently with the conservative tradition of the drama, which was bound up so closely with religion. But these are not the only reasons, for neither does Euripides use the third actor freely. The hesitation is to be ascribed to that Hellenic feeling for sobriety which controls the whole structure of Athenian tragedy, and in this case operates to prevent whatever excessive agitation might result from the entrance of a third person into a discussion. It is the same chaste spirit which forbids Sophocles, in a heated debate, to allow one long and impassioned speech to follow directly upon another of an opposing trend, and leads him to deaden

¹ *The Theory of the Theatre*, New York, 1910.

the force of the impact by inserting a neutralizing comment of the chorus between the two projectiles of language. In those few instances in which he purposely omits this precaution, the impression is all the more forceful by contrast with his usual method, as twice in the *Oedipus Coloneus* when the old man retorts first to the cajolery of Creon¹ and then to his accusations.²

The most important innovation is his consideration of a tragedy no longer as part of a trilogy but as a separate work of art. In Aeschylus each play is like a well-rounded act, which, though it does constitute a unit and may be judged by itself, is rather one in a series of units and acquires more value and interest when brought into connection with the others. As in the several acts of a modern drama, he prepares in one tragedy for the next: toward the end of the *Agamemnon*, Clytaemnestra begins to reveal signs of that weakened will which is to characterize her in the *Choephoroi*³ and in this second play of the trilogy, Orestes slowly passes into the madness which is to be his condition in the *Eumenides*. In distinction from the *Choephoroi*, the *Electra* of Sophocles is complete in itself. As if nothing had preceded, there is a careful description of the locality at the very opening, all aspects of the several characters are fully outlined in the course of the single play, and since there is no suggestion of retribution to fall upon Orestes,⁴ the audience would not expect another tragedy to follow. Inasmuch as in the consideration of a play as a separate entity Sophocles is an innovator, he has not quite learned, as has been demonstrated, to give a sufficiently extended exposition of preceding circumstances. Certain other qualities of Sophocles' dramatic art depend partially upon the abandonment of the trilogy form. Since he has only a single play in which to sketch his characters, he has to spend more time upon this aspect of the

¹ *O. C.* 760.

² *Ibid.* 959.

³ Cf. my article on *Aeschylus*, p. 51.

⁴ Aegisthus (*El.* 1498) speaks of future woes that are to be the fate of the Pelopidae, if he is slain, but the allusion is not definite enough to imply another play depicting the visitations of the Furies upon Orestes. I cannot with Christ (*Geschichte*, etc., p. 314, n. 4) see any hint of the Furies in Orestes' words after the matricide (lines 1424-1425):

τὰν δόμοισι μὲν
καλῶς, Ἰ Απόλλων εἰ καλῶς ἐθέσπισεν.

drama, toward which his temperament naturally inclined him. Again, if he is going to treat within the prescribed limits a whole myth or even, from all standpoints, a part of a myth, he requires more space for dialogue than the author of a trilogy, and thus is forced into a condensation of the lyrical passages, a perfectly natural tendency, however, as drama left farther and farther behind the primitive dithyramb.

Sophocles never carries these dramatic devices into the region of sensationalism. In speaking of Greek drama, and especially of Sophocles, we have often upon our lips such a phrase as "classic restraint," but on self-examination we sometimes find ourselves unable to define more accurately the impression that we derive from reading his works. A comparison with modern dramatic versions of the same myths, however, immediately throws into clear light this salient characteristic. In the *Ajax* he will admit no such distracting interests as Poinset de Sivry, who in an imitation of the middle of the eighteenth century,¹ with the eternally erotic tendency of all Frenchmen, which leads Racine to introduce a mistress, Aricie, for his Hippolyte in *Phèdre*, represents Ajax in the toils of a captive Amazon, who despatches him each day on perilous expeditions in her honor and in proof of his love, as a lady does her knight in a medieval romance, bidding him, for instance, hunt lions for her in the island of Tenedos! Sophocles will not descend to such bathos. Another signal example of moderation in the *Ajax* is the brevity of the passage in which the hero's madness is depicted upon the stage, where an Elizabethan dramatist would have revelled through a whole act of insanity. There were plenty of secondary interests from Athenian life which he might have introduced in order to make his tragedy more piquant, such as rhetorical debate, which he employs, to be sure, in this play, but not to the disproportionate extent of Euripides, who likes too well to curry favor with his audience. If he seeks to entertain by political innuendo or by flattering the literary knowledge of his hearers, the passage always has also an office in the development of the action, as the questions about the Hellenic heroes

¹ Cf. H. Patin, *Sophocle*, pp. 52-54. There is a similar distortion of the mythical material in the *Philoctète* of Châteaubrun, who destroys one of the fundamental tragic elements, the loneliness of the hero, by giving him the companionship of his daughter Sophie and her nurse, in order that Neoptolemus by falling in love may have an additional motive for his kindly disposition towards the father (cf. Patin, pp. 146-147).

in the *Philoctetes*, which deepen the perspective of the background. The moderns chafe likewise beneath the restraint of the *Oedipus Coloneus* and invent melodramatic variations to enliven the action. The Frenchman Ducis in his *Oedipe chez Admète* more than justifies the adjective which is usually applied to the drama of the eighteenth century, pseudo-classic. Feeling that the stories of Oedipus at Colonus and of Alcestis are too barren separately to attract the jaded hearers of his time, he combines them, by a somewhat clever device, it is true, but with a resulting duplicity of interest: inasmuch as according to legend Alcestis had died for her husband Admetus, as a sacrifice to the Parcae, and it was decreed that Oedipus should receive apotheosis at the shrine of the Eumenides, Ducis hit upon the ingenious scheme of joining the two tales by substituting the latter character for the former, finding no difficulty in confusing the Fates and the Furies. Sophocles introduces the inhabitants of Colonus into the orchestra by the natural method of sending after them a countryman who had chanced upon Oedipus; Ducis, thinking the device too simple and the peasant or burgher too mean a figure for the strutting stage of French tragedy, throws his hero into a spasm at the name of the dread goddesses, the tumultuous outcries of which bring those in the vicinity running to the spot. This sensational touch is imitated in the *Edipo* of the Italian dramatist Niccolini. Another typical detail of the same sort in the *Edipo* occurs at the end of the third act, which recalls the "Continued in our next" after an instalment of a modern serial: as Theseus commands the restoration of Antigone, an Argive enters to declare that Polynices marching near Athens had heard his sister's calls for aid and had arrived in time to behold a Theban's sword at her neck, and the audience is relieved only at the beginning of the fourth act with the information that she has been opportunely rescued by one of Creon's warriors.

One might go on to draw the traditional contrast between Euripides and Sophocles, pointing out, for instance, how the latter scorned the appeal to mock sentimentality in which the former indulged by debasing Electra still further into a peasant's wife; but let these few among many possible examples suffice to demonstrate in what ways Sophocles might have violated plastic simplicity. For his spirit may best be

¹ Beginning of Act II.

understood by a comparison with contemporary sculpture. As in the works of Phidias and his school, all superfluous ornament, even the luxuriantly figurative language of Aeschylus, all attraction of mannerism, all charm of mere prettiness, are refined away; his tragedies rely for their appeal upon the sterner, the nobler, the purer qualities of close-knit composition, a profound understanding of human character, an incisive and elegant style, and a strong, lofty, and wholesome philosophy. He stands as far removed from modern literary realism as does Phidias from the sculpture of the Quattrocento. His guiding star was what has been conceived by a great American master of aesthetics as the ideal of the artist: he aimed at Order and hoped for Beauty, as the highest reward of his effort, and the Beauty which he attained has the severity and chastity of the Parthenon frieze.